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LEO HUBERMAN and PAUL M. SWEEZY
ANDRE GUNDER FRANK and S. A. SHAH
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REGIS DEBRAY AND THE LATIN AMERICAN REVOLUTION

CLEA SILVA
EQBAL AHMAD
WILLIAM J. POMEROY
DONALD McKELVEY
WILLIAM A. WILLIAMS

Special 96-page issue

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EDITORS: Leo Huberman and Paul M. Sweezy.

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Last summer's special double (July-August) issue of MR was composed entirely of an English translation of Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* This summer, once again, the entire issue is devoted to Debray, but this time to a collection of essays on his theories and ideas. Most of the authors of these essays are critical of Debray, some highly critical. But none of them is hostile or lacking in respect and admiration. Régis Debray, as a result of a series of events which have received world-wide publicity, is now serving a 30-year sentence in a prison of United States imperialism's Bolivian neo-colony. He is there because, through his

(Continued on inside back cover)

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DEBRAY: THE STRENGTH AND THE WEAKNESS

BY LEO HUBERMAN AND PAUL M. SWEEZY

To understand the full significance of Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?*, one must recall facts which may have become dim in the memories of older radicals and have never been experienced, and perhaps never even read about, by younger ones.

The international revolutionary movement in the period between the two world wars was dominated by the Russian Revolution and the Soviet state which emerged from it. Success in the world's largest country conferred on Lenin and the Bolshevik Party prestige and authority without precedent or rival. Wherever revolutionary socialists existed, they formed identically structured parties and sought to follow in the footsteps of their Russian comrades. To these ends they joined together to found the Communist or Third International (Comintern) which was conceived as a sort of general staff of the world revolution with power to issue and enforce orders on its members. From the outset and throughout its lifetime (1919-1943) the Comintern was *de facto* controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union which thus became the supreme political and doctrinal authority of the world Communist movement. No party could be considered Communist unless it had a franchise from the International, and no person could be considered a Communist unless he or she belonged to such a party. So powerful was this institutional and ideological framework that it was virtually impossible for a revolutionary to function outside of it; and among those who tried, the most important group, the Trotskyists, paid it the compliment of emulating its structure down to the smallest detail.

Owing to the exigencies of the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and the Western imperialist powers, Stalin dissolved the Comintern in 1943; but by this time the patterns of

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thought and behavior which it embodied had become too deeply rooted to be much affected by a mere organizational change. Moscow remained a combination of Mecca and Rome for the Communist movement, the destination of pilgrimages and the fountainhead of truth. A rigid orthodoxy prevailed throughout the movement: of every party and every member there was demanded blind loyalty to the Party Line handed down from the center; and detected deviation could lead only to confession of error or excommunication (normally followed by relentless persecution).

Under the impact of the global upheavals touched off by the Second World War, this state of affairs began to change. It is true that the revolutions and socialist transformations which took place between 1944 and 1950, and which resulted in the expansion of the socialist bloc from one country with a population of some 200 million to nearly a dozen with populations totaling more than a billion—it is true that these historic transformations took place under the aegis of Communist parties which had until recently been members of the International and proclaimed their loyalty to the Soviet Union. But underneath the surface things were changing: a number of ruling Communist parties could no longer relate to each other as they had when only one was in power. The split (1948) between Yugoslavia on the one hand and the rest of the East European socialist countries on the other was the first overt crack in the old order. But far more important of course was the brewing conflict between the USSR and China which had its beginnings back in the 1920's and 1930's and which was to reach a climax in the public falling out and violent polemics of the 1960's. It was not only in the cases of Yugoslavia and China, however, that the old system broke down. Beginning in the mid-1950's the other East European countries showed increasing signs of independence, and the ruling Communist parties of Asia (North Korea and North Vietnam) followed China in rejecting Moscow's tutelage without evincing any wish to substitute Peking's. While in the period between the two world wars international Communism was rigidly monolithic, today it is irreversibly polycentric.

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Nevertheless, in some respects the ideology of the movement remained largely unaffected by the changes in the relations among the various Communist parties. In particular each national party continued to assume that it was the sole legitimate representative and mouthpiece of the revolutionary forces of its own country as well as the only party with the right to call itself Marxist-Leninist. It was assumed, in other words, that franchises granted by the Comintern four or five decades earlier retained their full validity in spite of the fact that the issuing authority had long since gone out of business.

This doctrine of what may be called "revolutionary legitimacy" was first successfully challenged in Cuba. In the spring of 1960, less than a year and a half after Fidel Castro and his comrades came to power, we wrote as follows:

> All the charges and accusations concerning the alleged Communist character of the Cuban government and/or Revolution tend to hide what may turn out to be historically one of the most important facts about the Cuban Revolution: this is the first time—ever, anywhere—that a genuine socialist revolution has been made by non-Communists! . . . No one can now foretell the full implications of this startling fact, but no one need doubt that it will open up new vistas not only in the realm of social thought but also in the realm of revolutionary action. (*Cuba: Anatomy of a Revolution,* p. 154)

As it happened, these implications took several years to develop. Partly this was because it was not until 1961 that the Cuban leadership itself recognized that it had in fact made a *socialist* revolution, and partly it was because this recognition came at a time when the Cubans were, so to speak, in love with the Soviet Union and hence in no mood to raise awkward questions about received Communist doctrine. A legalistic mind might even have been tempted to argue in those days that by absorbing the franchised Popular Socialist Party into the new ruling party then in the process of formation, the Cuban leadership was acquiring revolutionary legitimacy. With Cuba safely in the socialist camp under the direction of a franchised Communist party, the fact that the overthrow of Cuban capitalism had been engineered by non-Communists could then be written off as a unique aberration. In this way the doctrine that socialist

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revolutions can be made only by franchised Communist parties could be restored to its place of honor.

But things of course did not work out that way. The Cuban-Soviet honeymoon came to an end as soon as it became clear to the Cubans that the Kremlin was not in the least interested in further Latin American revolutions. And alongside disillusionment with the Soviet Union went disillusionment with the franchised Communist parties of Latin America which continued to take their line from Moscow. The rift between the Cuban leadership and orthodox Communism, which for a time seemed on the way to being healed, began to open up again and has been growing wider ever since.

If Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* is placed in this context, it will be seen to be not merely a sort of handbook of revolutionary tactics (which is the way many critics have treated it) but also, and in our opinion more importantly, a negation of the whole doctrine of revolutionary legitimacy, which has been one of the key components of Communist orthodoxy ever since the Russian Revolution. Debray quotes Fidel as saying: "Who will make the revolution in Latin America? The people, the revolutionaries, with or without a party." And he adds:

> Fidel Castro says simply that there is no revolution without a vanguard; that this vanguard is not necessarily the Marxist-Leninist party; and that those who want to make the revolution have the right and the duty to constitute themselves a vanguard, independently of these parties.
>
> It takes courage to state the facts out loud when these facts contradict a tradition. There is, then, no metaphysical equation in which vanguard=Marxist-Leninist party; there are merely dialectical conjunctions between a given function—that of the vanguard in history—and a given form of organization—that of the Marxist-Leninist party. These conjunctions arise out of prior history and depend on it. Parties exist here on earth and are subject to the rigors of terrestrial dialectics. If they have been born, they can die and be reborn in other forms. (pp. 98-99)

Debray here—and in fact throughout *Revolution in the Revolution?*—uses "Marxist-Leninist" to designate the Moscow-oriented Communist parties of Latin America. This is somewhat confusing since it suggests that he accepts their own self-evaluation. In the context of the book as a whole, however, it is clear

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that this is not so: Debray understands the nature of these parties very well, and by calling them Marxist-Leninist he certainly does not intend any compliment. Taking this into account, we can see that his statement amounts to a simple blanket rejection of the orthodox doctrine of revolutionary legitimacy. The Cuban Revolution proved in practice that non-Communists can overthrow capitalism: Debray's book provides this practice with its ideological counterpart. To this extent he is indeed dealing with a "revolution in the revolution," and he is fully justified in holding the Cuban model up for others to learn from. Whatever may have once been the case, the whole idea of franchised revolutionaries has lost its meaning in the world today; and we believe it is Debray's greatest merit to have said so—boldly, clearly, and without equivocation.

Debray himself would hardly be likely to accept this evaluation. He goes far beyond the rejection of the traditional Communist doctrine of revolutionary legitimacy and tries to deduce from the Cuban experience rules and principles intended to be valid for future Latin American revolutions. Debray's theory can be summarized in two parts:

First: Latin America is ripe for revolution. The existing system is maintained solely by the armed forces of the oligarchies in power, supported by United States imperialism. The problems are therefore how to destroy these armed forces and at the same time prepare the masses to play their part in seizing power and beginning the construction of the new socialist society.

Second: Both of these problems can and must be solved as Debray claims they were in Cuba, by the establishment and uninterrupted development of a guerrilla *foco*. This is first and foremost a *military* process, but it simultaneously accomplishes the three decisive *political* tasks of the revolution: (a) From the struggle itself a seasoned political leadership and vanguard emerge. (b) The armed forces of the existing state are drawn into battle and defeated. And (c) the guerrilla struggle politicizes the masses (in Debray's metaphor, the guerrilla force is the "small motor" which sets the "large motor" of the masses in motion) and thus lays the groundwork for the final act of the revolutionary drama—a general strike or an urban insurrection to seize and hold the now unprotected seats of power.

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This theory is subjected to criticism at many points by the contributors to this collection of essays, many of whom because of their particular experiences or specialized studies are well qualified to evaluate the way Debray handles his facts and draws his conclusions. What we would like to do here is not so much to add to these criticisms or try to combine them in a systematic whole as to pose some questions which are raised in one form or another by both Debray and his critics. To some of these questions it may be possible to give definite answers; others must be regarded as still open, requiring further study and discussion; while still others, and perhaps the most important ones, will only be answered in the revolutionary practice of the Latin American peoples.

(1) Are Latin American countries, or a considerable number of them, ripe for revolution in the sense that Cuba was in the 1950's? Debray assumes that they are, but he offers no supporting evidence or arguments. And yet this is evidently a crucially important question. If they are not ripe, is not the task of revolutionaries to help move them into that stage rather than court certain defeat by trying to make the revolution right away? It seems that what is needed here is painstaking analysis, from a Marxist point of view, of concrete social situations—the structure of economies, the relations and conflicts among classes, the level of consciousness of classes and strata, and so on. Debray not only contributes nothing in this area; he does not even show an awareness of its importance.

(2) A question related to the foregoing: What made Cuba ripe for revolution in the 1950's? Was it just exploitation and misery, as Debray seems to imply? If so, most societies should have been ripe for revolution from the beginning of human history! Or was there a special constellation of economic, social, and political conditions? If so, what was it and in what ways was it like or unlike the situations now existing in other Latin American countries?

(3) Apart from what it was that made Cuba ripe for revolution, we must ask whether Debray correctly understood what actually took place in that country. The essay in this collection by the Cubans Simón Torres and Julio Aronde challenges

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Debray's interpretation of the Cuban revolutionary process at many points. In the absence of a detailed history of the Cuban Revolution prior to 1959—a lack which Debray also deplores—we find it difficult to form definite opinions on this subject. But at the very least it seems reasonable to conclude (a) that Debray's version must be treated with caution, and (b) that unless it is substantiated by further study and analysis, it has scant claim to be considered a model to be followed by revolutionaries of other countries.

(4) Debray's book was written before Che's unsuccessful attempt to establish a viable guerrilla *foco* in Bolivia, so obviously he cannot be taxed with failure to analyze that episode. But the same cannot be said about the equally disastrous attempt of the Peruvian MIR under the leadership of Luis de la Puente to establish guerrilla *focos* in Peru in 1965. Debray refers to the Peruvian defeat but makes no attempt to analyze it.* When it is considered that De la Puente had spent time in Cuba and was consciously trying to apply the lessons of the Cuban experience, one can only ask: Why did Debray evade this issue? Was he perhaps afraid that an analysis of the failure in Peru would cast doubts on the validity of his own theory? (Needless to say, the Bolivian experience also cries out for analysis. Does the liquidation of Che's *foco* tend to discredit Debray's theory, or was it due to causes which it is justifiable to assume would not be operative in other cases?)

(5) How does it happen that Debray commits what is from the Marxist point of view the elementary error—emphasized by most of the contributors to this collection—of elevating the military over the political? Does he really understand so little of Marxism as to assume that anyone who takes to the hills can, by doing a good enough job of fighting, create a political vanguard, activate a mass movement, and lead a socialist revolution? Doesn't he know that there are many cases in Latin American history of rebels' fighting extremely well without accomplish-

Revolution in the Revolution?, pp. 59-60. Curiously, most of these two pages is taken up with disparaging remarks about MR and its editors, seemingly for having dared to raise questions about the meaning of the Peruvian defeat. There is so little point to what Debray actually says that one can hardly avoid the conclusion that his purpose is purely diversionary.

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ing any such miracles (the names of such men as Emiliano Zapata, Pancho Villa, and Augusto César Sandino come readily to mind)? Obviously we cannot assume any such abysmal ignorance of Marxism and history on Debray's part. We must therefore look for the explanation elsewhere, and we believe it is to be found in an assumption which he never spells out and is perhaps not even conscious of making but which nevertheless underlies and permeates his entire work. This is the assumption that in Latin America today all the necessary *political* conditions for successful revolution already exist just below the surface of social life. What is needed therefore is not to *create* these conditions through hard patient political work but to bring them to the surface where they can, so to speak, operate freely. And in Debray's view only military action (the guerrilla *foco*) can perform this function. It is supposed to do so in two ways: first, by attracting young people who already have the necessary political understanding, and molding them into a disciplined vanguard; and second, by dispelling the fear which has been the main if not the only force holding the masses in check. On this interpretation Debray is not guilty of the crude error of overestimating the military as such; he is simply saying that in the given circumstances a certain kind of military action *is* the appropriate form of political action.

(6) The question which the foregoing raises is obvious: If Debray is right that the precondition for successful revolution exists just beneath the surface, what accounts for this fact? If the answer is that they were generated spontaneously by the socio-economic development of Latin America, then Debray is indeed departing sharply from traditional Marxist-Leninist theory. If on the other hand the answer is that these conditions were created by earlier political activity, then Debray's theory can doubtless be reconciled with Marxism-Leninism; but it must be seen as a mere fragment of a theory of revolution, dealing with only one aspect of one phase of a whole revolutionary process. It neglects the political phase preceding the *foco* phase and in so doing almost inevitably distorts the character and underestimates the complexity of the political-military relation within the *foco* phase.

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(7) Final question: Why does Debray so consistently ignore or play down the political aspects of Latin American revolutionary struggles? Part of the reason has already been commented on: he assumes that the political preconditions for successful revolution already exist. But even if this were so, there would still be a need for continuing and indeed intensifying political activity. There always is such a need even after the installation of a revolutionary regime, as the history of every revolution, including the Cuban, clearly shows. Despite this, Debray seems to envisage a whole period—between the initiation of the *foco* and the winning of final victory—during which military struggle is the only form of political activity (in the sense indicated under (5) above). The explanation seems to be that there is no place in Debray's theory for an agency of political activity as such until *after* a new party has developed out of the *foco*. The traditional Communist parties are rightly treated as irrelevant to the revolutionary process, or worse; and Debray is apparently unable to conceive of any other organization playing a revolutionary role during this period. In his theory those not directly involved in the guerrilla struggle can acquire political experience and education only vicariously, through the example of the *foco* or perhaps from the guerrilla force's radio broadcasts. To say that this is a caricature of a real revolutionary process, as it took place in Cuba or is likely to take place anywhere else, is to put it mildly.

In the last analysis, it seems to us, the greatest weakness of Debray's theory is not its specific errors and omissions, important as they are, but its attempt to prescribe a course which all Latin American revolutions must follow. Even if one were to grant, which of course we do not, that Debray's analysis of the Cuban experience is wholly valid and that there are other countries where essentially the same process can be repeated, what sense would it make to hold this up as a model for the whole continent?

Take Brazil, for example, which after all is *the* decisive country in Latin America, a country with over 80 million inhabitants, more than three million square miles of territory, untold natural resources, and the most developed industrial base

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south of the Rio Grande. Does anyone believe that the revolutionary process in such a country will or could follow a course similar to that of Cuba? Or that an attempt to force it into the Debrayian mold would be other than disastrous?

Fortunately, Brazilian revolutionaries are under no illusions of this kind. Not much has been written about the Brazilian underground; in fact it has deliberately avoided publicity. But it is no secret to the Brazilian dictatorship or the CIA that there is a growing revolutionary movement in Brazil and that its leadership is increasingly coming into the hands of the *Açāo Popular* vanguard. In February and March of this year we were in Cuba, returning via Europe. In the course of our travels we had the good fortune to meet and exchange ideas with a representative of AP. What we learned was both impressive and encouraging. AP shares Debray's estimate of the traditional Latin American Communist parties (in Brazil the old CP under the leadership of Prestes is so discredited that it hardly constitutes a problem any longer), but it regards Debray's *foco* theory as irrevelant to Brazil's situation and problems. This does not mean that AP envisages no role for guerrilla warfare in the Brazilian revolution: quite the contrary. But the decision to initiate military operations will be made only when it is clear that such operations can be sustained at a *significant* level for an *indefinite* period of time. The question of timing is therefore left to the political leadership precisely because the answer depends on an accurate analysis of the overall situation, both national and international. In the meantime (and this may mean five or even ten years), AP sees its tasks as essentially political: carrying out intensive studies of Brazilian reality from a Marxist perspective (never done before by any Latin American party or organization); educating and training its own cadres and militants; organizing among students, workers, peasants; increasing the capacities of the organization itself; mass propaganda against the regime and its subservience to North American imperialism; and so on. AP's program is frankly socialist and recognizes that armed struggle is the only means to victory. However, it does not believe that the armed struggle will be limited to guerrilla *focos* but rather envisages the development of a people's war on a continental scale, with massive foreign intervention on the side of the existing social order. The whole

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process is expected to be a prolonged one involving phases and characteristics which have no precedents elsewhere and cannot now be foreseen.

Given this perspective, AP naturally believes that it has most to learn from other continental revolutions and people's wars—Russia, China, Vietnam. But it is not looking for models anywhere, and least of all in Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* Unless we are very much mistaken, what is likely to happen as the Latin American revolution develops is that more and more national movements will go the way of the Brazilian AP and fewer and fewer revolutionaries will be attracted by rigid models and schemes such as that proposed by Debray.

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CLASS, POLITICS, AND DEBRAY

BY ANDRE GUNDER FRANK
AND S. A. SHAH

No honest and constructive criticism of Régis Debray's work can fail to pay due tribute to its importance and its merits. As a revolutionary document in the best tradition of political writing, Debray's series of essays squarely faces and has obliged all of us to deal with those most important political problems of our times that many have sought to evade. Debray has convincingly criticized pseudo-revolutionary tendencies and has affirmed an honest call to revolutionary arms. Furthermore, his personal conduct has been consistent with his appeal, which is more than most of us can say for ourselves. But all this, as he would doubtless be the first to agree, does not place Debray's work above criticism. If anything, it renders a critique of Debray's writings, where objectively warranted, all the more important.

Debray's theses, in our estimation, call for a critique on two fundamental grounds: first, they do not derive from a fundamental *analysis* of Latin American society, and still less of its *class* structure; and second, in consequence, they divorce *theory* from practice and, mistaking the nature of the Latin American revolution, they underestimate the *political* role of military activity and mass participation, and their interrelationships. The lack of analysis of society would not be serious in a political tract (as distinct from an analytic work) if it did not result in the perpetuation in a different form of the very political weakness of revolutionary policy in Latin America that Debray himself wants to overcome. In making these

Andre Gunder Frank is Visiting Professor of Economics, and S. A. Shah is Visiting Professor of Asian Studies and History, both at Sir George Williams University, Montreal.

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criticisms, we direct them at the well known central theses of Debray rather than at "quotable" isolated affirmations in his writings, which often contradict his own central theses.

(1) Debray's writings are, and should be appreciated as, political tracts and not political analyses of Latin American society. No economic and social analysis of Latin America is to be found in Debray's three essays, not even in "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America,"* which may be said to be the most analytic of them. Specifically, there is no analysis of the productive or the class structure of Latin America or any of its parts. Accordingly, Debray also makes no political analysis of Latin American society—as distinct from, and as a basis for, the analysis of Latin American political movements that he does make. Nor does Debray make any provision for such economic-social-political analysis anywhere in his political program for the Latin American revolution.

This lack of analysis—and failure to rely on analysis—of the social milieu and dynamic in which the Latin American revolutionary must work certainly distinguishes Debray, and the Cuban Revolution as well, from the Soviet, Chinese, and Vietnamese Revolutions, in which not only Lenin, Mao Tse-tung, and Ho Chi Minh, but many other leaders distinguished themselves by the social analysis on which revolutionary theory and practice were both based. The leadership of these revolutions studied and understood the societies in which their successful political work was done. And, according to Debray's account at his "trial" in Bolivia, Che was himself writing a political economy of Latin America with one hand while fighting in Bolivia with the other.

Analysis, as contrasted to an empirical trial-and-error approach, does not mean importing the "national bourgeoisie vs. feudalism" schema from Moscow, or the "four group United Front" program from Peking, or the "uneven and combined development permanent revolution" formula of Trotsky. In Latin America it is necessary to analyze how the class structure was formed and is still being transformed through the colonial and neo-colonial structure that world capitalist development has

* *New Left Review*, September-October, 1967.

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imposed on all parts of the continent. This requires reliance on the Marxist *method* to study the reality, and the varieties of reality, in Latin America; and it does not permit the simple application of labels or schemas, used even by Debray, such as "feudal oligarchy."

(2) Debray divorces, or fails to marry, revolutionary theory and revolutionary practice. In denying the validity of, and therewith refusing to answer, the question whether the Latin American revolution is bourgeois or socialist, Debray confuses the political nature of the revolution. This mistake is, we suggest, a direct consequence of his failure to make the necessary analysis of Latin American socio-economic reality—however much, as has been claimed by many, Debray may or may not short-sell the relevance of European and Asian teachings. Furthermore, Debray's theory of the Cuban Revolution itself departs in important respects from Cuban revolutionary practice. For instance, the whole 26th of July Movement beyond the Sierra Maestra and its political significance for revolutionary practice and theory find no counterpart in Debray's model. The observation that this movement was of little use in supplying Fidel with weapons is not enough to dispose of its political significance and is only one of many symptoms of Debray's underestimation of the politics of revolution, Cuban or otherwise. Again, the Cuban Revolution's success was not just achieved in the Sierra Maestra before January 1, 1959, as Debray implies, but also in its development throughout Cuba after that date, as Debray would probably agree. For, as Fidel noted in his speech of April 8, 1968,

> in all fairness, we cannot say that the first of January [1959] was the triumph of the Revolution. Traditionally we have identified the Revolution only with armed struggle, but really on the first of January the rebellion triumphed. . . . In those early times, could we say, in truth, that we knew what a revolution was? In those times we had a feeling, which was the feeling of the struggle, the feeling of rebellion. . . .

Thus, just as July 26, 1953, or December 2, 1956, need not have led to guerrilla warfare (after all, they were not intended to, and other planned or executed uprisings did not do so elsewhere), so the fighting in the Sierra Maestra need not

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necessarily have led to the socialist revolution. Had the Cuban Revolution been unable to go beyond 1959, it would of course have been derailed and defeated altogether. Fortunately, the Cuban Revolution's momentum and direction (derived in part from political mobilization beyond the Sierra Maestra) were able to get it over the bourgeois hump. Not all revolutionary movements, even guerrilla-led ones, have succeeded. Most of them, and notably the Algerian, failed; and from Prestes in Brazil to Machado in Venezuela armed struggle has not provided a political guarantee against reformism. By contrast, their political direction of military action has permitted the Chinese and Vietnamese to avoid derailment of the revolution. Furthermore, it must be noted that the Cuban class structure, the Cuban bourgeoisie's decision—and ability to decide—to throw in the towel and move to Miami, and the international correlation of forces made the hump to be overcome in Cuba significantly lower than it is in the rest of Latin America today. Thus, Debray's account is not quite accurate; and, especially if the Cuban Revolution is to be regarded as a vanguard and integral part of the Latin American revolution, his model cannot be a sure-fire guide.

If Debray had wedded a program for revolutionary action to an analysis of Latin American society, or perhaps even of Cuban society, instead of deriving it mainly from an analysis (adequate or not) of the Cuban and Latin American revolutionary movements, he could never have been led to counsel revolutionary practice without—or rather with false—revolutionary theory. Specifically, an analysis of the class and neocolonial structure of Latin America would lead Debray to see that the current development of socialist revolutionary theory in Latin America is certainly a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for successful revolutionary practice. Specifically, to correct revolutionary theory it is necessary to insure that at the first obstacle supposedly revolutionary practice is not derailed into a *frente amplia* (broad front) such as that now joined by Prestes in Brazil, a *paz democrática* (democratic peace) such as that now advocated by Machado in Venezuela, or a NASAKOM (nationalism, Islam, and Communism) as practised in Indonesia under Sukarno—and to suffer their inevitable consequences.

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An analysis of the Latin American class structure would reveal who is the enemy to be fought (the bourgeoisie as well as imperialism), what political weapons he has at his disposal (reformism and temptation), whom the revolution can count on, how it must politically mobilize these people—in a word, what the theory and practice of the Latin American revolution must be. It is not for nothing that in his call for "Two, Three, Many Vietnams" Che said that it "shall be in Our America, almost certainly, a Socialist Revolution."

Debray's failure to analyze Latin American society and to link revolutionary theory and practice adequately leads him to underestimate the importance of political mass participation in the revolution and to omit the political role of military activity in organizing this mass participation. Debray appeals for a guerrilla push to get the revolution started, and he hopes that by putting its leadership into rural guerrilla rather than urban party or even *kaffeeklatsch* hands, the revolution will proceed to victory through the formation of a people's army. But nowhere does Debray suggest how the guerrilla band is later to develop into the people's army and the popular political movement the revolution requires. Far from suggesting how the guerrilla *foco* might create the political, or even military, conditions for this further development, Debray's critique of self-defense and guerrilla political work in rural areas and his disregard of guerrilla ties to a "26th of July" type movement in Cuba as well as elsewhere in Latin America would seem to argue against the organization of a wider political movement. Yet Fidel told the OLAS conference that the need for a guerrilla nucleus of the revolutionary movement "does not mean that the guerrilla movement can rise without any previous work; it does not mean that the guerrilla movement is something that can exist without political direction. No! We do not deny the role of political organizations. The guerrilla is organized by a political movement, by a political organization."

Thus, military actions require adequate political direction and support, lest like a house built on weak foundations the first storm destroy both foundation and superstructure. Clear class analysis is essential for carefully (tactically) selected and politically (strategically) guided armed actions to be militarily successful

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against the enemy, and politically successful in mobilizing the people as friends of the revolution. Not only is a *popular* base area necessary to assure the supply, communication, and propaganda requirements of military activity; but the latter must—and is essential to—assure further political mobilization and participation of the people. Thus, successful military action and correct political mobilization require adequate class analysis of Latin American society. Such political analysis unquestionably also points to the necessity of rural guerrilla warfare, but it would eliminate some of the contradictions and enhance the political strategy of Debray's program for the Latin American revolution.

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THE ERRORS OF THE FOCO THEORY

BY CLÉA SILVA

The concept, which is central to Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?,* of the subordination of the party to the guerrilla force, of the political to the military, is based on the assumption that "the revolution is formed in the struggle itself," a thesis defended by Fidel Castro. And yet no one can deny that the Venezuelan Communist Party fought with arms in hand, especially in 1963 and 1964. Today, according to Fidel, they have abandoned the struggle and taken the road of reformism. Here the logic of the argument appears to break down—armed struggle is not enough for the forging of a revolutionary consciousness.

During the Cuban Revolution, Fidel's conduct was based on the following premise: "To those who show military ability, also give political responsibility." And Debray comments: "It was worth the risk: Raúl Castro, Che Guevara, Camilo Cienfugos, and scores of officers who are today in the political leadership of a proletarian and peasant revolution." (p. 90)

Was it true that Raúl, Che, Camilo were good political leaders because they were good soldiers? Is it that the struggle itself made them good revolutionaries? This does not appear to be the case. When Che left Argentina, everything indicates that he was already a Communist. Likewise it can be said of Raúl and Fidel that when they left Cuba to prepare the landing of the *Granma,* they were already revolutionaries, the products of an ideological struggle which, for better or for worse, was already underway in Latin America.

Cléa Silva is the pen name of a Brazilian sociologist active in the struggle against the military dictatorship in that country. The author's review of Debray's theories was first published in Spanish in *Monthly Review: Selecciones en Castellano,* No. 45, December 1967, and was written before the death of Che Guevara in October 1967. This abridgment of the original text was translated from the Spanish by Bobbye Ortiz.

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Neither is Debray correct when he states that "it is war and its immediate objectives that unify." The example of Venezuela demonstrates the contrary: When the war was in full swing, the split between the Venezuelan Communist Party and Douglas Bravo came about. To be sure, it can be argued that in Guatemala the war is succeeding in unifying revolutionary organizations, but only after a long period. In any case, war as the only unifying factor, should not be accepted as dogma. What really unifies is not war but its objectives, the ability of the vanguard to serve as a coordinating center; and this requires, above all else, clarity of vision, i.e. an ability to analyze the historical process correctly, a demonstration in the daily conduct of the struggle, *in all basic sectors,* that the vanguard is an organized, disciplined, cohesive force—in sum, that it is a party.

It can be said that in Cuba there was no party. This is precisely the argument of those who seek the easiest, most convenient way to gain power. It is clear that every revolutionary movement must find the shortest road, but it must not be a road full of ambushes. That is the attitude of someone who seeks to transform the limitations and particularities of the Cuban Revolution into universal and all-embracing rules. The fact that the Cuban revolutionaries succeeded in making the revolution in spite of not having a party, confirms more than ever its particularity, not its generality. Nor does this mean that it is necessary to wait until the party satisfies all the preconditions (bases or cells in all the fundamental sectors, a complex and diversified structure, democratic centralism, penetration of the various sectors of the mass movement, and roots in the working class) in order to initiate an armed insurrection. But it must at least be *on the way to achieving these things.* Everything indicates that any armed movement that is undertaken in Latin America must face, *from the beginning,* not only domestic repression but imperialism itself, which will attempt to liquidate the revolution. Only a very well organized movement with a strong base of urban support (both from the military-logistical and the political points of view) can progress and triumph. This means that now, even more than before, the Cuban experience will not be repeated.

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The theory that the armed force is the embryo of the party is based on the assumption that all conditions are ripe and that there is no time to organize on a party basis. In contrast to this, Lenin said that it is never too late to organize. Finally, if we observe the countries of Latin America closely, we see that the majority of them are replete with small revolutionary organizations, with secondary differences, which individually fall short of meeting the requirements of a party but which, if they were united, would form such a party.

In sum, to initiate a direct confrontation with the repressive forces—that is, to initiate armed insurrection—it is necessary first to have a functioning minimal organization having the characteristics of a party. Perhaps it will not be a party in the fullest sense, perhaps it will not even be called a party—but heroism such as that of the *Granma* group is not sufficient. Even in the countries in which industry is not the fundamental economic factor and in which, therefore, the proletariat does not carry much weight in political life, the formation of a party is indispensable for the channeling of the revolutionary struggle. If in these cases the party does not justify itself from the point of view of the effective numerical strength of the proletariat, it does on the other hand justify itself fully from an operational point of view. How can an insurrection against such powerful enemies be organized and led without a solid, structured, diversified, coordinated, organizational apparatus? It is inconceivable that a localized *foco* in a rural area—even if it has a radio station—can direct, coordinate, and command a generalized revolutionary action! If Debray understood the initial role of the *foco* to be one of "armed propaganda" perhaps he would be more on the mark, but to wish to assign the responsibility for such broad and complex tasks to the *foco* appears to be a contradiction. We should remember that all countries do not have the geographical dimensions of Cuba. Brazil, for example, is a country of continental dimensions; there, a *foco* could easily be isolated; and if we assume the installation of several *focos,* the difficulties of coordinating action among them would be enormous. We shall return to these issues at a later point.

In *Revolution in the Revolution?* Debray quotes Fidel: "Who will make the revolution in Latin America? Who? The

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people, the revolutionaries, with or without a party." And he comments:

> Fidel Castro says simply that there is no revolution without a vanguard; that this vanguard is not necessarily the Marxist-Leninist party; and that those who want to make the revolution have the right and the duty to constitute themselves a vanguard, independently of these parties.
>
> It takes courage to state the facts out loud when these facts contradict a tradition. . . . (p. 98)

We can offer several refutations to this point.

(1) Fidel is right in saying that a revolution can be made with or without a party; but one must know which revolution is meant. A bourgeois-democratic or a democratic-nationalist revolution (for example: the French Revolution, the Mexican Revolution, and the Cuban Revolution in its first phase) can be made this way; not so a socialist revolution. It is argued that the socialist revolution passes first through a democratic-nationalist phase, a transitional phase which carries out the bourgeois tasks which the bourgeoisie is no longer able to do (such as, for example, a genuine agrarian reform) in order to arrive subsequently at a second phase, that of socialism. This argument is correct, but today it must undergo an historical adaptation, especially in regard to Latin America.

Prior to the Cuban Revolution a popular movement could, in a united front with a national bourgeoisie, with a party (China) or without a party (Cuba), make the revolution and fulfill the transitional tasks. After the Cuban Revolution the situation changed, since imperialism will no longer let itself be taken by surprise and the bourgeoisies tend to ally themselves with imperialism and to become increasingly less national. That is why the socialist character of the revolution will be determined from the beginning, even though many of the tasks to be carried out will be of a bourgeois-democratic nature. The Latin American revolution will have to face, from the start, a clash with the "national" bourgeoisie and with imperialism. In these circumstances, the struggle will be much more arduous, there will be a direct and definitive confrontation of classes, and the party will therefore be more indispensable than before.

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(2) It is necessary to examine two points in the above quotation from Debray: (a) When the independence "of these parties" is spoken of, we have the clear impression that reference is being made to the existing Latin American Communist Parties. But, can *these* parties be taken to exemplify a party? Are they, in reality, Marxist-Leninist parties? The great majority, at least, are not; and therefore if Debray speaks of revolutionary parties in general, while thinking of *certain* parties, he is mistaken, since he thus eliminates the possibility that genuinely revolutionary parties qualitatively different from "these parties" can exist. (b) Debray goes on to say: "These facts contradict a tradition." Contradict? A historical experience of one type contradicts another historical experience of another type? For example: Does the Cuban Revolution "contradict" the Chinese Revolution? Could the historic role carried out by the revolutionary parties have been false? Wherein does the magic of the Cuban Revolution reside, that it should be conceded the power of contradicting the others?

Debray states that the guerrilla force is the fundamental form of struggle, and that the leaders must become a part of it, since it is the safest place. Only a lack of imagination or of a good security apparatus can lead to the supposition that the leadership is safe only in the countryside. Where the fundamental form of struggle is developing, that is where the leadership must be. In a country in which the fundamental economic sector is rural, it must go to the rural areas; but, in a country such as Argentina, if the leadership were to be centered in the countryside, it would expose itself to isolation such as no radio station could remedy. The important thing is that the leadership must be truly capable of leading. To maintain *a priori* that it must be in the countryside is a dogma, and since revolutionaries are not religious, they do not accept it.

Of all Debray's errors, the most serious and dangerous is his proposal to liquidate, once and for all, the role of revolutionary theory. This is how he states the problem:

Quoting Lenin's phrase that "the civil war has *welded* together the working class and the peasantry, and this is the *guarantee of an invincible strength*," Debray thinks that in this

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reference to a civil war he has found the magic which will confer miraculous powers on the guerrilla force. And his conclusion is that "in the mountains, then, workers, peasants, and intellectuals meet for the first time." (p. 110)

The justification for "the first time" is not established. The labor movements have many, many times been counselled by revolutionary intellectuals, and workers have frequently exercised a direct influence on the middle peasantry.*

A romantic apologia for the guerrilla force leads Debray, finally, to the most dangerous conclusion of his study: "The best teacher of Marxism-Leninism is the enemy, in face-to-face confrontation. Study and apprenticeship are necessary but not decisive." (p. 111)

With this statement he is attempting to destroy the basic principle that "without revolutionary theory there is no revolutionary movement" and to substitute for creative Marxism a theory of spontaneity, which asserts the following: There are necessary factors and decisive factors; ultimately, there must be a scale of priorities, the decisive priority being the struggle which automatically (mechanically) generates the necessary theory. Theory thus appears as a necessary complement of the struggle, and it is perfectly well understood that for Debray the struggle signifies the gun in hand—he is not referring to the political and ideological struggle. But it happens that for a Marxist revolutionary the question is completely reversed. There is revolutionary struggle only when we know how, against whom, and at which moment we must struggle. But for Debray these are secondary problems, so much so that he maintains that in Latin America we must still struggle against the feudal lords.**

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* The organization of many peasant leagues in Brazil came about by means of the direct collaboration of the workers who, living in the cities, maintained contact with the rural communities. The peasant movement was always influenced by the labor movement.

** This is an indirect reference to a part of the original text of this review, which was included in the Spanish edition of MONTHLY REVIEW but is omitted from this abridgment, in which Cléa Silva shows that Debray, in his writings before *Revolution in the Revolution?*, still adhered to the theory of Latin American feudalism.—Ed.

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In order not to fall into the erroneous arguments which use the Cuban Revolution as a successful example of struggle without revolutionary theory, we must reiterate:

(1) The Cuban Revolution did not, at the beginning, have a socialist character, but it evolved in that direction. Today, any Latin American revolution will have socialist leadership as a prerequisite condition, and thus its character must also be socialist.

(2) Although the leaders of the Cuban Revolution searched in empirical fashion for the strategic road, ever since the assault on the Moncada barracks, without concerning themselves with producing their own theory, there was already in existence an international theory of revolution, Marxism-Leninism, tested successfully in the Russian and Chinese Revolutions. It was in accordance with this theory that Che left Argentina and set out in search of the revolution in Latin America. The same can be said for Fidel's and Raúl's joining up with the revolution. But what cannot be claimed is that the germs of the revolutionary party were already present at Moncada. This would be tantamount to claiming that the germs of the revolutionary party were already present at Fidel's birth. In sum, the Cuban Revolution had the particularity of being the synthesis of unique conditions, combined with the negligence of imperialism and the genius of its leaders. No one can guarantee that these factors will be found in the same combination again.

Nowadays no one can deny that "power is seized and held in the capital but the road that leads the exploited to it must pass through the countryside." (pp. 113-114) But it is necessary to emphasize the fact that the revolutionary movement is generated and takes shape in the cities, *passes* through the countryside and at the same time grows in the cities, in either explosive or underground forms of struggles. It is wrong to interpret *passing* to mean *removing itself to* the country. In the industrialized countries such as Brazil, Argentina, etc., the capitalist system can coexist with a localized insurrection in the countryside, because its strongest base is not there; but it will not tolerate or submit to attacks by the revolutionary movement on its productive centers—its urban industries.

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On the question of what is urgent and what is not, i.e. the scale of priorities implicit in all his works, Debray maintains that the military aspect is more urgent than the political because "it is possible to move from a military *foco* to a political *foco*, but to move in the opposite direction is virtually impossible." (p. 120) This is dogma without theoretical or practical justification.

Douglas Bravo began with a political organization in building a military *foco*. After a time he broke with that organization, but nonetheless he took something of it with him. Douglas Bravo's guerrilla force functions and will continue to function—to the extent that the revolutionary militants of the Communist Party of Venezuela and the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) are able to sustain and deepen the struggle by mobilizing the urban masses. Luis de la Puente emerged from a predominantly military organization to set up the guerrilla *foco* in southern Peru. He underestimated the repressive capacity of the enemy, and his urban support was weak. He failed tragically. Other examples could be cited. Why does Debray hardly mention the experience of De la Puente in Peru? Is it that he is not well-informed on this problem? If so, why did he not study it? Is it because the southern Peruvian experience reveals the weakness of the *foco* theory? History demonstrates that one of the fundamental factors that determined the failure of De la Puente's *guerrilleros* was his inability to analyze the socio-economic situation in Peru. De la Puente thought that the *foco* theory was valid. He did not see that Peru was in a phase of accelerated development boasting one of the highest growth rates in Latin America, and that in the course of that phase any insurrectional movement which might appear would have little chance of victory.* It appears that strategic errors were committed, a fundamental one being the underestimation of the repressive power of the dominant class and the overestimation of peasant support.

* For an analysis of the Peruvian situation and the causes of the failures of the MIR guerrilla forces, see the excellent article by S. Condoruna, "Las experiencias de la última etapa de luchas revolucionarias en el Perú," *Estrategia,* No. 3, Chile, 1966.

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In 1963 De la Puente declared: "Hugo Blanco on his own was able to mobilize the peasantry and accomplish what he did. Just imagine what we could do." The passing of De la Puente and his guerrilla *compañeros* leads to two conclusions:

(1) The personal sacrifice, heroism, and selflessness of the *guerrillero* serve as an example to all revolutionaries.

(2) At the same time we should not accept as example and guideline the absence of objective knowledge of reality, the underestimation of the enemy and of party organization and mass movements.

Yet Debray's erroneous affirmations contain a basic truth:

> One cannot see how a political leadership, in the Latin America of today, can remain aloof from technical problems of war; it is equally inconceivable that there can be political cadres who are not simultaneously military cadres. (p. 88)

This is correct. The cadre is primarily and fundamentally political, and by the mere fact of being political he understands that he must also be military. To sustain the converse, i.e. that the cadre is political by sole virtue of being military, implies the absurdity of confusing the means with the ends. Even though militarization is accepted as a fundamental factor, it is nonsense to speak of "the close tie between biology and ideology." It is possible to be a revolutionary leader and a military strategist, even if one is disabled. In sum, military strategy can and should be thought of in terms which are also theoretical if it is to be well applied.

If we wish to destroy imperialism definitively in Latin America, military training is indispensable. The struggle will be hard and long; all revolutionaries must be prepared on all levels; to the extent that the struggle spreads, military functions will not belong exclusively to the forces of repression or to the revolutionaries but to all the people. Therefore, the revolutionaries must prepare themselves to fight and to teach the people to fight. And because the Latin American struggle will have such a definitive character in relation to imperialism, Latin America is today more than ever faced with the need

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for revolutionary theory. The general contours are already given —Marxism-Leninism—and now it is a matter of using them as an instrument for analyzing our reality.

City and Countryside

Debray upholds the subordination of the city to the countryside, as a logical consequence of the decisive role which he attributes to the guerrilla force, which in turn is based on underestimation of the political and ideological struggles of the working class and mass movements. Debray goes further; he assumes the existence of determinate schemes of action, fixed rules that cannot be violated, since they are the only effective ones. Debray's source of inspiration continues to be the Cuban Revolution and, apparently, the Venezuelan rising of the last few years. It appears that Debray, Fidel's intellectual offspring, does not succeed in theorizing one step beyond his teacher; if we compare his study—especially the chapter dealing with the city-country problem—with the speech in which Fidel broke with the Venezuelan Communist Party, it can be seen that this was his source of inspiration. Fidel correctly analyzed many of the limitations of the revolutionary movement in that country; but to deduce general laws for the Latin American revolutionary movement from this, as Debray does, appears to us to be absolutely erroneous. In other words, Fidel's analysis of concrete, specific situations is, in general, unquestionably correct; but to attempt to draw generalizations for the entire continent from Fidel's thought is erroneous.

First of all, we must state clearly that urban militants do not lead an easy existence. Only an intellectual who has never lived in clandestinity can have such a false idea. Which does not mean to say that underground existence is, in general, horrendous. Many bureaucrats manage to operate clandestinely for years in a tolerable way, but it is ridiculous to believe that underground existence is a kind of *dolce vita.*

Furthermore, Debray's ideas concerning activity in the cities contain a deep contradiction: On the one hand, there is the "bourgeoisie" of the movement, which remains in the

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city. On the other, he points out that the leaders should go to the rural areas, since they are safest. How is it that the "bourgeoisie" prefers to remain in the "cemetery" (Fidel's term), in precisely the most dangerous place?

"Let us examine the casualty lists: almost all the dead (as well as the imprisoned) were party members." (p. 86) At the same time that he points out that cities are the most dangerous places, he says that those who "don't want to die" remain there. Debray states that the dead and imprisoned are principally party members, that the "ruling class knows very well whom it must kill—the political-military leaders—whom it can leave in jail or at liberty—the politicos—and those whom it wishes to release from jail or leave alone." (p. 69) He states at the same time that in Latin America there is "selective assassination"—"kill the leaders, leave the rest alive." This allegation is also erroneous. In the list of the Venezuelan dead, the longest list in all Latin America, it is probable that not many leaders will be found. In general, the bourgeoisie has few scruples about killing workers, because when it is a matter of assassinating revolutionaries a class criterion also functions. An individual, however subversive and whether a leader or not, has more possibilities of survival if he belongs to a rich and influential family than does a peasant or a worker. This is only one aspect of the problem. Public opinion also exerts pressure. It is easier to kill an anonymous activist than a known popular leader. The example of Hugo Blanco is a good illustration of this. In referring to the risks involved in descending from the mountain, Debray states the problem irrationally and dogmatically and tends to overestimate the power of the repressive forces and to underrate that of the underground apparatus. He speaks of "a deadly risk. Sooner or later the guerrilla leader will fall. . . ." (p. 68) This is dogma. Risk exists both in the cities and among the guerrillas. Fabricio Ojeda, for example, died when he came down to the city. But why did he die? Because he was not protected by the underground apparatus of the revolutionary movement; he spent the night in the house of a known reactionary who betrayed him for a fistful of dollars. It appears that Douglas Bravo and other militants who were

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called to a meeting in the same house barely escaped the same fate. What does this prove? That the city is an absolute risk? Or that such a risk is run when there is no functioning city organization?

But Debray is right in stressing the profound existential problems that underground city activity can generate, including the risk of neurosis, isolation, the impossibility of a deeper human contact among the members of the urban guerrilla forces, for example. This is because contacts among activists are professional, so to speak, and are limited to the absolutely necessary. The individual's identity is never revealed, and he is transformed —in the last analysis—into a cog in a wheel. Of course there is a deep human solidarity, but that solidarity is extended to the comrade, not to the friend or individual as such. Such is the price a revolutionary must pay while waiting for the compensations offered by the new society he is going to create, if he does not die first. A revolutionary is one who knows how to live for the future; if he is unable to, he is not a revolutionary. But it is false to point up all these problems, real and difficult as they are, by counterposing them to a false picture of the situation of the guerrilla force in the countryside. The *guerrillero* faces another type of problem, equally capable of engendering neurosis and anguish. For example, the abandonment of family, the insecurity of nomadism, war neurosis, military discipline which, however consciously accepted, must be rigid and implacable. We arrive at the conclusion that one form is no more or less formative or deformative than another; that the task of being a revolutionary in the country or in the city does violence to the individual; and that a revolutionary can transcend this threat of self-violence only if he possesses a clear idea of why he does violence to himself, what he is giving his life to—in sum, when he perceives the full grandeur of the cause.

This means that political education plays a decisive role. It is not enough to despise exploitation, it is necessary to have the conviction that it can be conquered, and it is also necessary to know the ways in which it has been vanquished in history. This is a conviction which an exclusively military cadre can never achieve. That is why the Chinese and Vietnamese Com-

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munist Parties never depreciated the importance of ideological education for their cadres. Very much to the contrary: those who were in the front line of fire in the Chinese Revolution underwent intensive courses of study; the line of spontaneity, of allowing the struggle alone to be the forger of the revolutionary cadre, was never followed. Spontaneous hatred of exploitation alone does not lead to victory.

It is true that the political cadre must also be a military cadre, and it is important to emphasize this. But it must not be forgotten that there is nothing new in this idea. The history of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions shows no separation between the political and the military cadre. Mao, Chou En-lai, Ho Chi Minh, and many many others, are living examples of this union. Trotsky and Stalin also proved to be great strategists; and Lenin, even though not a soldier, understood problems of strategy. A revolutionary cadre is not formed only in a school for cadres or in an "ivory tower." If Debray's conception of struggle were that of a broad struggle, he would be right in claiming that the cadre is formed in the struggle. But we must state it clearly: *not* only in armed struggle. The cadre is formed in political struggle, in ideological struggle, and *also* in armed struggle. To overestimate one of these forms to the detriment of another is an error which, wherever it is committed, endangers the life of the movement. Debray moves precisely in that direction when he underestimates, or rather when he fails to understand, the role of the ideological and political struggles.

Debray's inability to understand that diverse forms of struggle have to be combined is clearly demonstrated by his claim that "in America, wherever an armed political vanguard exists, there is no longer a place for verbal-ideological relation to the revolution, nor for a certain type of polemic. We are on new ground. . . ." (p. 123) This misconception led him to misunderstand the important role that will be played by the organizations that sprang up in Latin America after the Cuban Revolution. It is true that many of them, as already noted, went astray when faced with the dilemma of *foco* or party. And many became neither one nor the other. But all

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have had an important role in the ideological struggle against reformism; and many, beginning with that ideological struggle, will play an important part in the final struggle against imperialism. Debray was not capable of perceiving the scope of revolutionary action among these organizations because he thought that by wasting their efforts in the struggle he considered to be secondary they would be prevented from finding the road to insurrection.

In respect to the problem of the formation of revolutionary cadres we must distinguish two aspects:

(1) It is one thing to note that "traditional political education" is inadequate.

(2) It is another to say that good ideological and military education cannot exist.

Regarding the first point, even though it is true that traditional political education has many shortcomings, this is no reason to condemn every educational program. This is another instance of negativist dogma. But where does Debray get the idea that the new Latin American revolutionary activists will continue to have the same shortcomings? Such a belief assumes a vanguard's inability to evolve.

He clearly evinces his contempt for political struggle when he says that "it is useless to create antibodies in the heart of existing political organizations. . . . The creation of one more political *foco* mobilizes only the mobilized." (p. 121)

These allegations contain quite serious errors:

(a) Since its program is the reflection of a popular army's objectives, a minimal educational program for this army is necessary. An army without a program is an army without definite objectives—to do what? This reflects Debray's cult of spontaneity.

(b) Debray considers program, alliances, fronts to be "artificial machinations." This might be true in the specific case of *certain* programs, *certain* fronts, and *certain* alliances; but it is absurd to generalize. The revolutionary movement in Latin

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America will enter its higher phase when it is truly capable of making solid alliances and fronts, which can be attained only on the basis of common programs.

(c) "The antibodies in the heart of existing political organizations" will advance the revolutionary process if they are revolutionary antibodies in the heart of reformist organizations.

(d) As for Debray's statement that political activity can mobilize only the already mobilized, it is so obviously erroneous that there is no need to discuss it. It would be opportune to remember that in Latin America there is an enormous revolutionary potential among the masses and that therefore they have always followed leaders who spoke a populist language. Perhaps the best example is that of Janio Quadros in Brazil, who was elected by several million votes. It is a fact that the oldest left organizations, especially the Communist Parties, always trailed the masses, using at times a language more timid than that of many populist candidates. Latin America is fertile soil for revolutionary political action.

The Character of the Latin American Revolution

Once the revolutionary process is conceived of in continental terms, prior experiences must not be underestimated, especially the experiences of the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions. Further, to the extent that the revolution is considered to have a continental character, the Cuban experience necessarily ceases to be the model.

Given the fact of an extended and protracted struggle, whether from the point of view of geography and synchronization, or from the point of view of the revolution's penetration at all levels, or from the point of the inevitable confrontation with the foreign invader, what must be sought in the Chinese and Vietnamese revolutions is not a mechanical model but profound inspiration. It is therefore nonsense for Debray to say that " 'the storm centers' and their revolutionary vanguards seem to move increasingly away from the forms of organization and agitation inspired by the Chinese comrades, whereas they gain ground among the European militants and in politically becalmed regions." (p. 124n)

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There is much to be said in a discussion of this problem from the political-military point of view. We must limit ourselves here to some general statements:

(1) The Latin American revolution will be a long war in which there will be a direct confrontation. On one side will be imperialism, the dependent bourgeoisies, the *latifundista* sectors, the upper peasantry, increasingly restricted sectors of the middle classes which profit from the system, elements of the petty bourgeoisie, and the national armies which are instruments of domination. On the other side: the urban and rural proletariat, the poor peasants, the middle progressive strata (some of the students, intellectuals, professionals), a segment of the petty bourgeoisie and the clergy, and the inhabitants of marginal communities.

(2) Given the prolonged and violent character that the war will have, it will tend to involve all the people (by people we mean the classes and sectors enumerated above). It will be a generalized war in each country and on the entire continent.

(3) Thus Latin America will witness the renewal of all prior forms of struggle (from street actions to large-scale battles between armies); and, as in Vietnam today, completely new and varied forms of struggle will have to be created.

(4) If we accept the foregoing propositions and if we conceive of the war as a people's war, we cannot *a priori* claim that such forms of struggle as "armed propaganda" and "self-defense" have been superseded. Why superseded? All forms of struggle can be used and combined.

(5) It is a mistake to attempt to define the fundamental form of struggle. Absolute priority of one form over another cannot be conceded. Priority has to correspond to each phase of the struggle, and we must always remember that forms of struggle will be combined. Consequently guerrilla forces will be used; regular armies will be created; shock troops, urban sabotage, mass mobilization, self-defense, etc., will all have to be used. A form of action which may prevail at a given moment may lose its predominance at another. This is the great lesson to be learned from the Vietnamese struggle.

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(6) A continental revolution is a must if a national revolution is to triumph. If a country that is isolated from the rest of Latin America attempts a revolution it will immediately suffer an imperialist invasion. But if the revolution is extended to all the countries of the continent, action by imperialism will not be feasible. It is easy for imperialism to invade a single country and control its key points; it is impossible for it to invade and control all of Latin America. Why? "If the enemy concentrates its forces, it loses terrain; if it disperses, it loses strength." (Giap) The revolution's prime enemy is imperialism; if it were only a matter of doing battle with national armies it would be relatively easy to defeat them. However, the continental revolution will be carried out by means of national revolutions, which implies coordination of national movements.

(7) There are only two hypothetical cases in which continental revolution would not be a decisive factor for national revolutions: (a) if a thermonuclear war were to break out; or (b) if the revolutionary movement in the United States were to evolve in such a way that it could take over from Latin America the task of dealing the final blow to imperialism. These two cases are very improbable.

Conclusion

Criticism of Debray's formulations has become necessary because of the influence his works have been acquiring on the continent. His essays are impressive. At first glance, they appear to be well founded, since they make reference to the situation in various countries and give evidence of deep knowledge. But this seeming profundity is apparent and illusory. In fact, Debray collected information about the experiences many of the revolutionary movements had undergone, but he did not succeed in finding a true *explanation* of what occurred and what is occurring in Latin America because he did not begin by a socio-economic analysis of our continent, an analysis of its condition as a dependent capitalist economy.

It is natural that Debray's works have elicited enthusiasm among the youth, because they are, after all, an ode to youth;

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but they have also elicited enthusiasm among intellectuals and this is inexplicable.

One final observation: Debray merits our profound admiration and respect. Even if from the theoretical point of view his thought diverges from the points of view presented in this work, his personal conduct, the dignity and courage with which he is facing the severities of Bolivian and imperialist repression without abdicating his convictions, are a great example; just as his enthusiasm for the revolution—perfectly reflected in his works—and his strong determination to oppose imperialist repression also constitute a great example.

For Régis Debray and for all the revolutionaries of the continent, it is clear that oppression is a passing phenomenon and that it is undergoing its death agony.

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QUESTIONS ON THE DEBRAY THESIS

BY WILLIAM J. POMEROY

At one point in Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* (MR, July-August 1967, p. 59) he criticizes the MONTHLY REVIEW editors for attempting to formulate strategical concepts of revolutionary warfare in Latin America from the armchair, so to speak, without basing those concepts on the accumulation of tactical data. Debray, it seems to me, has committed what amounts to the same mistake by elaborating a doctrine based on much too little in the way of tactical experience, to say nothing of misreading that experience upon which he bases himself.

Virtually total reliance has been placed by Debray on his exposition of the tactics of the Cuban guerrilla force led by Fidel Castro. The conduct of the Cuban struggle was beyond any doubt an outstanding example of revolutionary leadership from which many lessons can be learned. However, it must of necessity be seen in the context of Cuban conditions, the particularity and the totality of which were indispensable to the success of the struggle.

One of the features of the Cuban situation which Debray and many others have been inclined to overlook or ignore was the background of organizational experience and of mass struggle possessed by the Cuban people. Oriente province, in the mountains of which Fidel established himself, and its capital city of Santiago de Cuba which he used as a supply base, were locations where mass organizational work had long existed and where people had a familiarity with revolutionary movements. Communist organization, for instance, had previously been

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William Pomeroy played an active role in the Philippine Huk movement, was captured in battle in 1952, and served 10 years of a life sentence for "rebellion" in a Philippine prison before release through a pardon. He now lives in London.

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carried out there as well as in other parts of Cuba. A guerrilla force operating in Cuba had this circumstance to rely upon.

On page 113 of *Revolution in the Revolution?* Debray quotes a letter written by Fidel to Frank Páis on July 21, 1957, in which he expresses amazement at the type of assistance given to his forces by the peasants: "Who has organized them so wonderfully? Where did they acquire so much ability, astuteness, courage, self-sacrifice? No one knows! It is almost a mystery! They organize themselves all alone, spontaneously!" The mystery is explained by the fact that Cuban peasants and workers were not strangers to organizational activity.

This whole question of mass organizational experience and struggle is the absent thread in the tapestry of Debray's theorizing. Together with it goes, of course, the question of the role of the political party in helping to give this experience to the people, both before and in the midst of the revolutionary struggle, armed and otherwise.

Like Debray (whose experience, moreover, was vicarious when he wrote his book) I base myself on limited knowledge, acquired during participation in a single armed guerrilla struggle, in the Philippines. My views are offered not in the form of doctrine but as one experience to be considered with many others in the formulation of principles of revolutionary struggle.

The revolutionary force known as the Huk movement in the Philippines was a party-led movement. Strictly speaking, the *Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan* (Army of National Liberation) was an armed mass organization which had a separate identity from the party, although the two were interconnected, with directives coming from a party source. Created during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War (when it was called the *Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa Hapon*, or Army of the Country Against Japan), it followed classical form in being based squarely among the people, in the lowland *barrios* and towns. It was founded on the prewar peasant unions in the Central Luzon provinces, and virtually all of its military cadres, as well as many cadres of the party, came out of these organizations. Without that background there could not have arisen a people's guerrilla force, a fact proven by the nature of the many other guerrilla bodies that came into being in the Philippines

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during the war that had American or Philippine regular army leadership and that imposed themselves on the people, often in a semi-bandit manner, without organizing them.

It is at this point that, to a large extent, the Philippine experience deserves to be considered in the light of the Debray thesis, for certain aspects of his principles came into play. The armed force, the Huk, was used as the instrument for spreading the movement. Expansion forces, similar to the columns advocated by Che Guevara and Debray, composed of 30 to 60 men and some women, were dispatched over mountain trails to other provinces, there to create bases, i.e., areas where the masses would be won over to support of the movement. The concept of "the propaganda of action" was also developed, the belief being that military attacks on the enemy, upon garrisons and in ambushes, was the short cut to winning the masses to our side; in fact, the mere presence of our armed forces in a locality, posing an armed challenge to long-dominant government or landlord armies, was believed to be effective in rallying mass support to us.

This method proved to have its limitations: it caused the government to increase its armed forces greatly and to put *their presence* in the same areas, which tended in the long run to cancel out the effect of our own soldiers. "Propaganda of action" can also be felt in reverse, as when government troops score an annihilating victory over a guerrilla unit, which often happened.

Only where the masses had had some degree of organizational experience were our forces able to stabilize themselves for any length of time, as in Laguna province, where the prewar Sakdal movement (a messianic nationalist movement that staged an abortive revolt in 1935) had been strong and where trade unions had been active in coconut processing industries. On the other hand, an armed unit set up on Negros island, where there had never been any organizational activity, was wiped out as soon as it was formed. In other areas, where the masses were not prepared to contribute guerrilla recruits, *lumpen* elements of a semi-bandit type (usually primitive social rebels) perforce came into guerrilla ranks. Some of these were transformed into real revolutionaries, but others broke and did great harm. This

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sort of thing happens in trying to expand a struggle to which only a minimum of "pure" revolutionaries of the highest ideals are attracted.

Lessons of this kind convinced the movement that it was absolutely essential to build an organized and politically conscious mass base along with an armed force. Liberated areas were not created (the idea was rejected as unrealistic), and the concept of peasant "self-defense" was never used or considered. What was attempted, with success, was an underground mass base that could function even in localities strongly garrisoned by the enemy. In the Philippine case, therefore, the armed guerrillas were not looked upon as the political organizing force, but as fighting units of the movement as a whole. All expansion forces were set up to carry with them a party unit of political cadres that had the task of organizing the *barrios* and towns in the new region. They were not soldiers, although they invariably carried at least a side-arm and were ready to defend themselves; and the camps or mobile headquarters that they sought to establish in the expansion area were separate from the military camps, although they would likely have a security unit attached to them. At times *barrios* would be surrounded and entered by armed units and propaganda meetings would be held, but it was the party political cadres who had the responsibility for making and developing the contacts, for nurturing the nucleus, and for broadening it wherever possible into a fully organized *barrio*. (It was considered axiomatic that the best protection against informers was a fully organized *barrio* in which the inhabitants themselves, for their protection as well as ours, would be alert for such elements and would eliminate them when discovered.)

The importance of political cadres functioning as part of the guerrilla movement is best seen, as a matter of fact, in expansion conditions similar to those in which Debray visualizes the armed force as "the party in embryo." One of the indispensable features of building a revolutionary movement in a new or expansion area is the development of cadres and forces from the area itself. Until this is accomplished, the expansion force is an alien element. In the Philippines it was most essential because the languages, economies, and customs vary sharply

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from region to region and even from province to province. (Regional peculiarities of this kind are to be found in most countries, and people coming from outside of a given region are strangers in more ways than one.) The recruitment of fighting men was undertaken, but a primary step was the setting up of political schools or study courses for the training of local leaders; and this, through experience, could only be done properly by the people in the party organization trained for such tasks. Debray mentions, in passing, that after guerrillas enter a village and leave, cells are to be set up, but who is to do the work of organizing, guiding, leading, and patiently developing the inexperienced population? We found that it had to be done by party cadres trained for it. (Incidentally, cadres with much experience in city trade unions did excellently in this work.)

Debray, in developing his central contention that the guerrilla force should be "the party in embryo," goes to the extent of putting it on a biological basis, saying that "physical aptitude is the prerequisite for all other aptitudes." As a rule, in the Philippine experience, the members of the Huk armed forces, young and vigorous though they might be, were less developed politically than those who did political work as party cadres. This was not according to our desire. Efforts were made to give political education to Huk armed forces, and the best military cadres were sent to political schools. However, it was a circumstance with which the Philippine movement had to contend that many of the physically fit young men who joined it were attracted by the adventurism and by the physical challenges and satisfactions of it. Many of the best fighters, and the most skilled with weapons, had little discipline when it came to books and study sessions. Furthermore, the exacting conditions of combat guerrilla life, with frequent periods of hunger and weariness, gave small opportunity for political education. It was only in the well-established base areas where that was possible to a degree, but this is not what Debray is writing about. As far as elderly cadres, whom Debray would rule out of the guerrilla movement entirely, were concerned, there were many of them in their 50's and even a few in their 60's, carried along by conviction and revolutionary determination, who stood up to

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the rigors of Huk guerrilla life much better than a good many young and politically immature members.

The Huk movement also had experience with the problem of risk involved in contacts by the guerrillas with the people as a whole (with the "civilians," as we called them). Of course there were risks, for the people as well as for the guerrillas, but no struggle is without its risks. As we saw it, in meeting these risks, and the persecution that goes with it, the people acquired their experience in organization and struggle. For us, the struggle only acquired real meaning when it was a struggle of the whole people.

As far as risk is concerned, in the Philippines the armed guerrilla struggle produced worse difficulties for cadres in the cities and towns than in the countryside, where one felt that one at least had armed protection and a fighting chance. The introduction of armed struggle, whether in the hinterlands or not, arouses the suppressive agencies and activities of the whole state. The imperialists and their allies in the Philippines took advantage of the armed crisis to crack down on trade unions and other legal organizations, with or without evidence of collusion with the guerrillas. Thus the Congress of Labor Organizations was outlawed early in 1951 and its leaders imprisoned without evidence, to be finally declared innocent (and the CLO to have been illegally suppressed) by a Supreme Court ruling in 1966! Many cadres assigned to stay in the cities, who wanted to work there, were compelled to go outside to join the political or military units of the guerrillas. The skilled underground worker in the city had as high esteem in our eyes as the bravest man with a gun, and the blows that we felt the most were the occasions when these cadres were arrested or killed.

There was much more in the Philippine experience that it would be useful to discuss. In a previous issue of MONTHLY REVIEW (September 1963) I have written of reasons for the defeat of the Huk armed strugggle, none of which, I feel, had to do with the structure and pattern of organization of the movement as a whole as I have described it here. When the defeat occurred, it took place first in the areas of expansion, where the mass bases had not had time to mature in the revolutionary sense. There it was easiest to isolate and to destroy the

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Huk units; and once these (made up usually for the most part of the expansion forces from other regions) were destroyed, the new area was not yet in a position to develop from its own masses the conscious elements to rebuild guerrilla forces. What occurred was a gradual shrinking of the struggle back to the original mass base in the Central Luzon provinces, where the Huk armed units were never destroyed and where armed struggle in one form or another has persisted to the present time, continually replenished by masses that have had the experience of organization and struggle.

A serious factor that arose during the Huk struggle must be mentioned. This was the tendency for certain outstanding military cadres to receive from their units a personal loyalty to themselves, not so much because it was cultivated by them but because their daring and their personal qualities of military leadership won such great respect. The respect ran to the individual commander rather than to the movement of which they were a part, so that the men loyally followed such leaders into errors as well as into correct actions. Wherever party guidance was loose, or wherever schools, classes, and political education in general were neglected, this was likely to occur. Some of the units had to be broken up and dispersed to other commands so that dedication would be to principle and to the movement as a whole rather than to personalities.

In the course of the prolonged armed struggle there were instances in which armed units lost their links with party political guidance, or in which the more dedicated of the military cadres were killed, an attrition factor that is at work as soon as the struggle gets under way. As a result, a number of serious cases of banditry and of semi-banditry occurred. Wherever the party was not able to exercise its leadership and its control, the Huk armed forces tended to disintegrate or degenerate. (From the little available evidence, some of the so-called renewed Huk activity reported recently in the Philippines seems to have this character.)

Strategic and tactical aims in the Philippines and objective conditions in the expansion areas during the Huk struggle were not so greatly different from those in Latin America that their

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lessons cannot be considered. For security reasons, there is a limit, I realize, in discussing particular struggles and their problems; but unless all experiences are analyzed and weighed the probability is that a good many misconceptions will persist.

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DEBRAY AND THE CUBAN EXPERIENCE

BY SIMÓN TORRES
AND JULIO ARONDE

Theoretical conceptions are forever being attacked by other conceptions, from the Right and from the Left. Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?* is no exception. Its publication produced an immediate reaction from the camp of reformism. A long political practice with its corresponding theorizing was shown up for what it is. And it is precisely this which constitutes the strong part of the work. But it is not enough for criticism to be sound for the theory on which it is based to take the place of the theory being criticized. Although it may seem paradoxical, a criticism which is fundamentally correct may be ill-founded. And inasmuch as theories which are upheld by strong political organizations with international support do not immediately yield the field when they are subjected to criticism, but rather cling to it more tenaciously, such theories find the condition for their own permanence in the weakness of critics' arguments.

Hence the responsibility that falls on criticism from the Left. Such criticism is perhaps belated, particularly that which originates from Cuba, the country which serves Debray as a model; for it is surely in Cuba that criticism should be undertaken by the participants in the Cuban revolutionary process, since they are in a better position to formulate it, but only provided they become a source of authentic knowledge about their experiences. Special circumstances prevented our criticism from being more timely, so that now it has to be accompanied by self-criticism for the delay.

Today Debray is serving an unjust sentence dictated by

Simón Torres and Julio Aronde are Cuban revolutionaries. The views they express in this critique are their own and are not intended to present the position of the Cuban Communist Party or the Cuban leadership. The translation from the Spanish is by Carmen Downs.

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North American imperialism to its Bolivian goons. Only the interests of the revolutionary movement justify challenging the work of one who can hardly participate in the debate at this moment. For this reason our contribution to a discussion which has already been opened is accompanied by the expression of our solidarity toward one whom we consider not only an intellectual but a revolutionary fighter.

The Political and the Military

When Debray analyzes "Armed Self-Defense" (*Revolution in the Revolution?*, pp. 24-47), he shows how this conception is a disguise for political conceptions—economism and spontaneity—which have as their point of departure a relative equilibrium between classes. But in the next two sections ("Armed Propaganda" and "The Guerrilla Base") there is no similar unmasking. The invalidation of the concepts is not accomplished by showing that they are incorrect politically, but rather by *comparison* with other countries. Thus armed propaganda is valid for Vietnam for various reasons (density of population which permits the propagandist to mingle easily with the people, the linking of the propagandists with support bases, etc.), whereas it is not valid for Latin America (the *focos* are in sparsely inhabited areas; division, control, and surveillance of zones; absence of regular forces; etc.).

On this basis Debray concludes that "armed propaganda follows military action, but does not precede it." (p. 56) According to Debray, this is the lesson for our continent.

An attempt is then made to base this postulate on the Cuban experience. The ground has been prepared for the first inversion of terms, by means of which the guerrilla force begins to determine the entire historical process. The reasoning is as follows: (a) variation of the concept of armed propaganda not according (as before) to political factors, but according to technical considerations (density of population, control, organizational stage of guerrilla force, etc.); (b) neglect of any substantiation of the concept on the political level, contrary to what we had been led to expect; (c) inversion of terms based on a manner of viewing the Cuban experience; (d) beginning of the self-development of the concept of the guerrilla *foco*.

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Inasmuch as reliance on the theorizing of the Cuban experience serves as a pivot for the above-mentioned inversion, we must begin by putting things in order.

To support his argument (propaganda follows action) Debray points out the following detail: "During two years of warfare, Fidel does not hold a single rally in his zone of operations." (p. 54) Here the gun appears in place of political action. But Debray does not tell us what the conditions are that make this possible. They are basically two, and they refer precisely to political factors: the intense political propaganda effort carried out by Fidel from exile and by the July 26th Movement (M-26-7) within Cuba, and the relatively virgin state of the Cuban countryside, which had not been won over to the positions of the bourgeoisie.

There is one extraordinarily important detail. Fidel, against all military considerations, announces that his expedition will arrive in Cuba in 1956 and no later, expressing this in a specific political slogan: to be heroes or martyrs that year. Military madness full of political wisdom: the important thing then was to win over to Fidel's ideas the broad masses, particularly in the cities. We must keep in mind that Cuba was going through a profound crisis of traditional political parties and leaders, which had left undirected the political energies of the masses after Batista's coup and the crumbling of the Orthodox Party. To win over these masses was the first condition for victory, and that is why the military line had to be subordinated to the political.

What of the countryside? What were the political conditions there? Let us mention a few: absence of a deep ideological effort on the part of imperialism, the bourgeoisie, and the Church; absence of an organized struggle for land, which would imply the existence of definite political conceptions; direct peasant-army confrontation, in which the army upheld the big landowners (rule by machete, evictions, i.e. violence against the peasant masses). Thus political action is not indispensable: it can be carried out by means of the gun, which breaks the subordination of the peasant to bourgeois power, brutally personified by the *guardia rural*. The political confrontations had already taken the form of direct clashes between the army and

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the peasantry. In these circumstances, the gun of itself compensates for the lack of political activity and is, in fact, the only thing that can change the relation of forces in this sector of society.

Only Debray's silence concerning the political conditions that sustained guerrilla military practice in Cuba allowed him to put the guerrilla force before political activity.

There are other political forces which Debray pushes aside, thus obscuring their role in the entire revolutionary process. We shall mention two cases.

First, that of the Revolutionary Directorate, a political organization created in February, 1956, by the Federation of University Students (FEU). The survival and initial successes of those revolutionaries in the July 26th Movement who had become *guerrilleros* cannot be understood without studying the student struggles which attained incredible aggressiveness in the years 1955 and 1956, and the activities of the Revolutionary Directorate which carried out the attack on the Presidential Palace on March 13, 1957—three months after the landing of the *Granma* when the forces in the Sierra were still very weak.

Second, it would also have been a good idea to analyze the real role of the PSP (*Partido Socialista Popular,* the pre-revolutionary Communist party) which, although it adopted the line of armed struggle only in 1958, influenced certain sectors of the working class, promoting other forms of political activity in the overall context of the class struggle at the center of which stood the Rebel Army.

Thus, the Cuban lesson as conceived by Debray is a sectarian lesson, and therefore a bad lesson which in no way can help the revolutionary organizations of the continent to solve the problems which have already arisen, problems of the unification of truly revolutionary forces.

Let us now continue our critique of the text, seeking to sketch a theory in which guerrilla struggle appears not as a magic *foco* but rather as a center in which all political struggles are combined and developed.

The Party-Guerrilla Relationship

Debray does not treat this relationship as the principal

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problem inherent in a specific political practice, that of the forms of organization and leadership which an armed vanguard based in the countryside must produce in order to be able to channel and activate mass struggle in the *entire* country.

For Debray the party-guerrilla relationship begins and ends as a relationship between geographical terms which, furthermore, possesses for him an irreducible antagonistic content. It is the so-called *Llano-Sierra* or *Ciudad-Sierra** relationship in which, according to Debray, the "bourgeois" city is opposed to the guerrilla force which expresses the interests of the proletariat. The latter must always be on guard against the former.

This Manichean formulation (*Llano-Sierra*) begins by committing an injustice. It is true that for the inhabitants of Latin American countries the conditions of life in rural areas are infinitely more arduous than those that prevail in the city, but the hardships of the *guerrillero* do not justify ignoring the rigors endured by the clandestine urban fighter: to write that "any man, even a comrade, who spends his life in the city is unwittingly bourgeois in comparison with a *guerrillero*" (p. 70) is not only an insult but also stupid; but this stupidity is necessary as an argument for the theoretical construction erected by Debray.

Actually, the *Llano-Sierra* juxtaposition is equivalent in Debray to a class conflict; but, all the same, matters become complicated because it happens that sometimes the guerrilla-proletariat "needs" the bourgeois city: "When a guerrilla group communicates with city leadership or its representatives abroad, it is dealing with 'its' bourgeoisie. Even if such a bourgeoisie [read *Llano*] is needed—as an artificial lung is needed in moments of asphyxia—this difference of interests . . . must not be lost sight of." (p. 71)

At this point Debray mentions the condemnation by Fidel of the Miami Pact of 1957 and defines for us the sad consequences of the guerrilla force's "need" for the *Llano,* i.e. its logistical dependence, its military dependence, and the absence of a single command.

Thus for Debray everything begins with one proposition:

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* Literally "plains-mountain" and "city-mountain."—Trans.

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"The lack of political power [of the guerrilla force] leads to logistical and military dependence of the mountain forces on the city." (p. 70)

But it is just at this point that we should stop to verify the supposed proof: the Cuban experience. To begin with we realize that throughout Debray's study there stands out, as usual, the *absence* of a basic factor of that experience: the various social classes which participated *within* the July 26th Movement in the struggle against the dictatorship—or better still, the specific *way* in which they participated.

Provisionally, we can say that the so-called *Llano-Sierra* relationship serves to conceal three distinctly different relationships of a simple struggle for political hegemony within a particular class.

Under Cuban conditions the workings of these three relationships appear as follows: The establishment of a guerrilla force (not actually accomplished until the *Granma* expedition, but projected as an alternative to that expedition) was prepared, during most of 1957, under the aegis of the aid that the *Llano* was to give it. However, it is precisely this term "aid" that must be analyzed in its effects on the different levels which correspond to the above-mentioned relationships.

The word "aid," in terms of the relationship of classes within the July 26th Movement, came to represent at a given moment the political ascendancy of elements of the national bourgeoisie in a particular place: that is, in the *Llano* leadership. The appointment of Faustino Pérez as coordinator in the West was not only accompanied by a directive to give priority to the sending of supplies to the *Sierra*; it also posed the question of obtaining these supplies. So much is obvious. Money was needed: it was the bourgeoisie who had it, and it was not everyone who could make them part with it. During this period a subsidiary organization of the July 26th Movement called *Resistencia Cívica,* made up of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois elements, assumed a predominant role in the political leadership of the struggle in the city, while the rank-and-file militants of the Movement (grouped at first in the Brigades and later in the Action and Sabotage apparatus) were displaced and shut out.

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Let us be clear: Faustino, Marcelo Fernández, Armando Hart were appointed by the *Sierra* (not so in the case of Frank País) to carry out a task; the problem lies in the fact that the conditions for success involved bringing about a change in the relationship of classes within the Movement and at the same time created a number of contradictions.

If, inevitably, the material strengthening of the *Sierra* under then existing conditions was brought about at the cost of having a good part of the *Llano* leadership dominated by national-bourgeois ideology, this was to lead not only to a series of conflicts of various kinds, but also to one failure: that of the general strike of April 9, 1958.

In this regard Debray tells us two things. First, "Fidel, from the first day, laid down a clear strategy, all the more far-sighted because the July 26 forces were more numerous and better organized in the cities (Santiago, Havana) than in the mountains during that phase of the struggle." Second, with respect to the directive given to Faustino by Fidel to gather all resources and send them to the *Sierra,* "this led to more than one conflict with the urban wing of the movement." (p. 76)

It turned out that this strategy with respect to sending supplies, of which Debray speaks, was incompatible with the implementing of another strategy which was subscribed to by the whole July 26th Movement, including Fidel: that of carrying out the revolutionary general strike. An ideologically bourgeois-national leadership in the *Llano* and the absence of military resources in the cities were to be decisive factors in the April 1958 fiasco. But if Debray does not analyze this point, still less does he stop to analyze the nature of the "conflicts" to which this directive gave rise. For him the thing is simple: "The tactical conflicts that are bound to arise, the differences in evaluation and line, conceal a class conflict, in which the interests of the proletariat are not, paradoxically enough, on the side which one would expect [i.e. the city]." (p. 77)

One might well ask in what respect the "differences in evaluation" conceal a class conflict. The whole thing stems from the fact that Debray's premise is erroneous. There never was such a thing as "the city" or "the *Llano*" taken as a homogeneous entity where everybody appeared alike. Far from it. The

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"city" was the *place* where the class contradictions became sharpest; and if Debray, who claims to have studied the Cuban experience (he had ample time to do so), is unaware of this factor, then one must say that he has not understood anything.

With respect to the interests of the *Sierra* leadership and that of the *Llano*, one can indeed speak of a conflict between antagonistic classes; but this conflict was related only to the objective of the revolutionary general strike, because it was precisely this *Llano* leadership which at a certain stage made possible the supplying of the *Sierra* at the cost of weakening the city's revolutionary potential.

On the other hand, the revolutionary wing of the July 26th Movement in the *Llano* was faced with a double contradiction. The class conflict between this wing and the *Llano* leadership was irreconcilable and total. At the same time, with respect to the *Sierra's* position of monopolizing resources, we can say that the *Llano* militants (and in this case we would have to include a leader like Frank País) stood in a *tactical* and not a *class* contradiction vis-à-vis the *Sierra*.

Nevertheless, in order to give validity to his theory of city-guerrilla Manicheanism, Debray falsifies the real nature of this contradictory complex when he comes to analyze that decisive event of April 9, 1958.

For Debray, first of all, the April 9th strike appears as an event from which Fidel and the Command of the Rebel Army are detached. If in the end Fidel backed the strike he did so because he "became the victim of the 'subjectivism' of the civilian wing of the movement." (p. 77)

To the extent that it is a question of fixing responsibilities with respect to the actual preparation and implementation of the strike, doubtless these should be attributed entirely to the *Llano* leadership; but the relation between the guerrilla leadership and the conception of the general strike as an aim of the struggle is quite another thing.

As it happens, a few lines back Debray himself had said that "one of the few actions that the city was able to propose and impose was the general strike of April, 1958, which ended in catastrophe. . . ." (p. 77) But how can we reconcile the word "impose" with his description of the strike, according to

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which one fine day Fidel was deceived by the "subjectivism" of the civilian wing of the Movement and "agreed" because "it was for the city dwellers to decide what was to happen in the city"? (p. 77)

There is no doubt that Fidel was deceived, but only to the extent that the available information was inexact. As a matter of fact, and as Che points out, concerning the *evaluation* of information provided by the *Llano* leadership, the Rebel Army Command shared "the reservations" which the PSP had expressed over the prospects of success of the projected strike.

What were these reservations and, if they were substantial (which doubtless they were), how do we explain a consent on the part of Fidel which would compromise him? Could it be only because "it was for the city dwellers to decide what was to happen in the city"?

The truth is not to be found in this aggregation of explanations based on naïveté, misinformation, and simple division of labor. The explanation is of a different nature, beginning with a *class* reason, i.e. that, given certain conditions, the *Llano* leadership, ideologically bourgeois-national, could (as Debray recognizes) "impose" *its strategy*, chiefly because of the politically important position it occupied in the leadership of the revolution.

But there were other reasons as well. On the one hand, there were undeniable subjective conditions among the masses for calling a strike. By the end of March the development of mass struggle had reached a climax: it had either to move to a higher stage or to regress. And in the last analysis we must not forget that the July 26th Movement, both in the *Llano* and in the *Sierra,* had proclaimed the revolutionary general strike as the ultimate objective of the struggle.

Thus, a whole tangle of contradictions appeared on a specific date and with specific conditions. Fidel had to accept not the idea of a strike but the bourgeois-national strategy, and pay the price for it. A few days before April 9, when the *Llano* leadership met in Havana with those in charge of Action and Sabotage, the latter were clearly opposed to a strategy that condemned them not only to political defeat but to death. When the plan was explained to them one thing was evident:

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beyond providing armed support for a strike, they were being assigned to carry out a putsch in which, to make things worse, there were no arms (only hundreds of waiting men) and they had to begin by obtaining them.

In that meeting the collaboration of the PSP was called for (in clear opposition to the anti-Communist line of the *Llano* leadership); in the end, going to a sure death was accepted for *reasons of discipline*; because, for better or for worse, *hic rhodus, hic salta*; and because the entire July 26th leadership, including Fidel, had gambled on that card. On the 9th of April, 1958, Marcelo Pla was to lead to their deaths a group of militants in order to carry out an action (the assault on the armory) in which he had no faith. Within a few days over one hundred fighting cadres of Action and Sabotage were murdered by the police, and toward the end of April a document reached the *Sierra* signed by dozens of militants analyzing what had happened and demanding that the *Llano* leadership be replaced.

It is plain that Debray is ignorant of these basic facts when he says without further ado: "For the city, the guerrilla movement was a symbol, the purpose of which was to create the conditions for a coup d'état in the capital." (p. 77) And later, quoting Che: "The *Llano* favored generalized armed struggle throughout the country, culminating in a revolutionary general strike that would drive out the Batista dictatorship and establish a government of 'civilians'; the new army would then become 'apolitical.'" (p. 78n)

In this regard we must clear up certain misunderstandings. The "military coup" and government "of civilians" with an "apolitical army" (which implied keeping a part of the old bourgeois military aparatus) were, we know, objectives of the *Llano* leadership; for them the *Sierra* was surely "a symbol" and the armed struggle an element of pressure (we must not forget the contacts made in April, 1958, with the United States Embassy, the Catholic Church, etc., by elements of the *Llano* leadership); but for precisely these reasons this leadership never intended to carry out a real revolutionary general strike.

However, for the militants of the July 26th Movement, for the armed fighters of its action apparatus, and for the working masses and the students in the FEN (*Frente Estudiantil Na-*

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cional) and the FON (*Frente Obrero Nacional*, later the FONU *Frente Obrero Nacional Unido*), a revolutionary general strike which was to culminate in an insurrection backed by a powerful Rebel Army was the goal of the struggle, and the events of early 1959 corroborate this point.

Is it necessary to demonstrate that the failure of April 9, 1958, did not in fact prove the impossibility of a revolutionary strike backed by a guerrilla movement, but only the failure of a bourgeois-national conception of "using" the armed struggle? And can this failure hide the tactical differences between the guerrilla force and the urban masses, which arise because of the very conditions of development of the guerrilla movement *in Cuba,* differences related to the different classes which were opposed to the dictatorship?

In the Cuban case the different priorities assigned to different forms of armed struggle are explained by a class analysis. But it is necessary to understand that there were also struggles for hegemony within the different class positions, struggles which were closely linked to tactical antagonisms. What other character did the relations between the July 26th Movement and the Revolutionary Directorate have? Or again, at least in part, the relations between Fidel and Frank País during 1957? Or between the militants of the *Llano* and the *Sierra*? (Debray refers to this kind of contradiction as the problem of a unified command.)

We must begin at the end. With regard to Cuba, anything that can be said about the party-guerrilla relationship based on equating the *Llano-Sierra* dichotomy with a class conflict is not only false but makes no sense. At all times the contradictions operated *within* the organizational structure of the July 26th Movement and in relation to the political practices of the different social classes which made up that organization.

Debray operates only on the level of appearances; he never even asks himself what the July 26th Movement was, nor what role was played by the armed units within it. From the time Fidel went to Mexico he had a plan to which he adhered throughout the struggle. This plan might be indicated metaphorically by means of a pyramid in which the organizational forms which constitute the base are broad enough to contain

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different classes, while the apex is made up of a coherent armed nucleus, capable of subordinating conflicts "from below" in the interest of activating all forms of struggle against the dictatorship.

It is necessary to be clear about certain things. Fidel never thought in terms of a long drawn-out war. He did understand and see that, given Cuban conditions, a small armed nucleus capable of waging the struggle in the different sectors (and the central problem was actually that of creating a specific party organization of a new type), could cause the explosion of the innumerable contradictions which threatened the bourgeois military regime whose social base was exceptionally small.

This is a plan for political organization which corresponds to a method of activating different struggles under Cuban conditions: those of workers, students, peasants, the national bourgeoisie. Is it necessary to add that the armed unit, superimposed on the other forms of organization and leadership and also in the position of an organizational "center," fulfilled a double function: first, to maintain the cohesion and functioning of *one* front of classes; and second, within that front, strategically to guarantee the primacy of the most revolutionary classes?

Thus we come to a crucial question, to the one place in which Debray attempts to see what the Rebel Army represented in terms of a *class relationship.* (Of course, he does not analyze the politico-organizational forms clustered around the armed unit, nor does he touch upon the actual historical process which produced the variety of those organizational forms, including those of the armed unit itself in *each stage of the struggle.*) Thus Debray tells us:

> The worker-peasant alliance often finds its connecting link in a group of revolutionaries of bourgeois extraction, from which a substantial part of the guerrilla command is recruited. . . . Such is the law of "equivalent-substitutions" in countries that have been colonized even to a limited extent: one finds that a working class of restricted size or under the influence of a reformist trade union aristocracy, and an isolated and humiliated peasantry, are willing to accept this group, of bourgeois origin, as their political leadership. In the course of the struggle which awakens and mobilizes them, a kind of provisional delegation of powers is produced. (pp. 111-112)

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It is important to begin by clearing up the ambiguities in the text itself. First, the "connecting link" of the worker-peasant alliance is not "found" (in the case of Cuba) "in a group of revolutionaries" but at most and in a particular stage, in that politico-military organizational form represented by the Rebel Army. Second, the simple designation of the condition in which one or the other class (the workers and the peasants) is found does not explain why it is in this way and in no other in which the law of "equivalent-substitutions" is realized in the case of Cuba. Third, to say that "a kind of provisional delegation of powers" takes place, which in the end turns out to be a variant of the old theory of representation, is totally inaccurate even if one accepts the theory of representations and of substitutions by implicit mandate.

If we examine the Cuban historical process, we find the following factors with respect to the working class:

(a) The working class was not the point of departure for the political regrouping of the revolutionary classes.

(b) The existence of the armed struggle offers the working class a revolutionary way out, but that way out must operate within the context of the multi-class front, where the bourgeois-national presence in the *Llano* is politically and socially dominant (especially in the leadership of the July 26th Movement).

(c) The context of this front prevents the working class from *directly* asserting its interests, i.e. by means of a party and its corresponding ideology.

(d) The Rebel Army, when in May, 1958, it became a dominant and autonomous political force above the July 26th Movement, created for the working class a new area of participation in the political vanguard.

(e) The Rebel Army offered this possibility for various reasons. First, it had a predominantly radical petty-bourgeois and peasant composition, which was not in contradiction with the interests of the proletariat and which did involve it in mutual hostilities vis-à-vis the national bourgeoisie. Second, the political hegemony of the Rebel Army had operated ever since the defeat of the national bourgeois elements liberated the guerrilla leadership from bourgeois influence on all levels (including the material).

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(f) It is thus in the Rebel Army that the working class, *alongside* the peasants, could assert its interests with respect to the national bourgeoisie; but this meant asserting them in a certain way.

(g) The interests of the proletariat thus prevailed by means of the military predominance of a popular armed unit and the support accorded to the petty-bourgeois political leadership, which, because of the very class conflicts inside the revolutionary front, saw its power of decision increase.

(h) Class contradictions, transmitted to the military level and in turn defined by a system of *indirect* relationships of confrontation between the proletariat and the national bourgeoisie, were resolved by political trust in a leadership which had the form of the "unquestioned leading personality," as the only means of maintaining the cohesion of the anti-dictatorship multi-class front during the final stage of combat.

Who Created Whom?

Debray uses his particular approach to the study of the Cuban experience to justify the following conclusion: "*The people's army will be the nucleus of the party, not vice versa.* The guerrilla force is the political vanguard *in nuce* and from its development a real party can arise." (p. 116)

Previously he had told us that in Cuba "the party, the usual instrument for the seizure of power, was developed *after* the conquest of power," (p. 105) although it existed in embryo in the Rebel Army, and its first leaders emerged on the 26th of July, 1953.

On the contrary, the real process was this: in the period July 26, 1953, until the formation of the Rebel Army, came the emergence of the first group of party leaders (without a party!); with the formation of the Rebel Army, came creation of the embryo of the party; development of the party and its formal constitution came after victory. In other words, in Cuba the guerrilla *foco* did not create the party, but rather a political organization with very definite characteristics which distinguish it from the traditional Marxist parties, the July 26th Movement, formed the guerrilla force.

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In July, 1955, a few days after Fidel came out of jail, the July 26th Movement was officially formed, with a central nucleus made up of the men who had attacked the Moncada barracks. In the process of its formation and in the following months the Movement grew with the accretion of other political forces (Frank País and his men in Oriente, new recruits from within the youth movement and the Orthodox Party, etc.). The Movement takes the form of a broad-front organization in which diverse classes and social groups take part, based on a democratic program and having the immediate objective of overthrowing the dictatorship.*

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* With his *foco* conception, Debray is obsessed with showing how *everything is created by the foco, and also attributes to it the formation* of alliances. Again the inversion of terms conceals the richness of the whole Cuban process. This procedure wipes out with one stroke the forms in which alliances came about in Cuba prior to the constitution of the guerrilla force: (a) the class alliance within the July 26th Movement, to which we have referred in the course of this review; and (b) the alliances between the Movement and other political organizations.

We are here taking into account the Mexico Pact signed by Fidel and J. A. Echeverría in the names of the July 26th Movement and the Revolutionary Directorate. In this case that "something *extant*" of which Debray speaks (p. 84) is precisely a liberation program. It appears that in Mexico some contacts were also made with leaders of the PSP, an organization that had influence over the sugar workers, in order to synchronize the arrival of the *Granma* with the political struggles of the labor sector. Agreements were entered into with other insurrectional organizations for the purpose of constituting armed apparatuses in various provinces of Cuba.

The specific form taken by the alliances between classes and political organizations, coupled with the fact that in Cuba the traditional political parties lacked popular support (and there were no parties of a reformist character that influenced the masses), gave exceptional characteristics to the entire unifying process. This is enormously important, because there were objective criteria for the pacts and alliances. If, despite the exceptional nature of the Cuban case, they came about, it is to be hoped that they will also take place in other countries with much more complex party relationships.

For this reason it is absurd to condemn the unity pacts which preceded armed action, as Debray does when he affirms that it is not the front which creates the nucleus of the popular army "but it is the nucleus that, as it develops, allows for the creation of a national revolutionary front." (pp. 83-84)

The point is not to condemn all alliances, but rather to condemn certain forms of unity that lead to the betrayal of fundamental principles. In Cuba, for example, alliances never jeopardized the process of armed struggle.

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The entire July 26th Movement was not on the *Granma*, only a part of it. The other part had remained in Cuba, primarily to provoke insurrectional acts to coincide with the arrival of the expedition. The initial plan was not the formation of a guerrilla *foco*, a form of struggle that was discovered later, but to land at Niquero in Oriente Province at the same time that uprisings were to take place in Santiago and other parts of the island.

Here again military action presupposed premises and considerations of a political nature: the existence of the national political organization in charge of the uprising; the synchronization of the landing with a sharpening of the class struggles in their various forms; the assumption that in Oriente exceptional political conditions prevailed, due to which the main action was to take place in that province.

Later, when the men who managed to survive and were not jailed after the landing regrouped, forming themselves into a guerrilla unit, they received the first reinforcements, arms, and supplies from the organization of the Movement in Santiago, which was able to survive despite the fact that the uprising in that city had failed.

We have seen how the political organization in Cuba was a broad-front movement of several classes and, according to its organizational form, was an insurrectional body with a central armed nucleus. These characteristics corresponded to the particular conditions of the country and to the way in which the latent social contradictions had to be resolved. Fidel's great achievement was to have created the July 26th Movement taking these conditions into account and without imitating other existing political organizations. The broad base of the Movement corresponded to the narrow social base of the Batista government under conditions of profound crisis of the traditional political parties which permitted a regrouping of forces in a new way; and its central armed nucleus corresponded to the form in which it was necessary to liquidate the bourgeois-*latifundista*-imperialist domination. Batista's March 10 coup had closed all avenues to a reformist way out of the national political situation.

With the development of the struggle the armed nucleus

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was to be localized mainly in the Sierra Maestra, but other parallel organizations were to exist whose function it was to work among the various social classes and groups. The guerrilla does not activate, as if by magic, the other forms of struggle by means of the simple political rallying "around it of the exploited classes." Debray's conception of the *foco* here takes the form of a *foco*-magnet which attracts to itself the struggles of other classes. The real activation of the various forms of struggle comes about through the various bodies of which the organization is composed and through the system of relationships which it maintains with other political forces and organizations.

It is true that Debray does not altogether deny the existence of an activating means for the various forms of struggle originating in the guerrilla force: he assigns this role to the radio transmitter which the Rebels had at their disposition. Political organization is thus replaced by a purely technical medium which had the advantage of "giving a new quality to the guerrilla movement." Here, too, we can penetrate Debray's "technicist" conception and find behind it a political conception which has surely been discredited: spontaneity in organizational problems, to the criticism of which Lenin more than fifty years ago devoted his *What Is To Be Done?*

Radio, without a doubt, constitutes a propaganda and ideological factor of the first order, but it is incapable of taking the place of organizational work itself in its military and civilian forms. How could Debray explain the failure of the April 9th strike when the Radio Rebelde already existed? Based perhaps on its having done a poor organizing job? Or perhaps it is because its relatively limited "rating" in April did not give it time to become the organizational medium which would guarantee victory? The possibility that this last answer might be Debray's cannot be discarded, because the "rounding off of the final victory" is attributed by him to the fact that "Fidel broadcast his denunciation of the maneuvers for a coup d'état in the capital, thus depriving the ruling class in a matter of minutes of its last card." (pp. 108-109) It is here perhaps that Debray's spontaneity reaches its culminating point: within "a few minutes" the radio mobilizes, no one knows how, the broad masses and brings about final victory.

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Here we do not know what Debray has in mind; had he but spoken with a few of the combatants of the different July 26th Movement fronts and of other revolutionary organizations, he would have come to know the efforts required and the blood shed in order to keep the masses organized and prepared so that when Batista fled, at the moment in which the Rebel Army advanced in the central regions, their political energy could be channeled against *coup* maneuvers in accordance with Fidel's counsel from the *Sierra*.

Lessons and Experience

In conclusion let us ask: what does the Cuban experience contribute, if in the last analysis it does not offer any "recipe"?

In the first place it presents a *theoretical problem* with a precise and special point of departure. That is, the first thing to be determined by analysis are those elements which are *absent* in the revolutionary perspective in the rest of Latin America.

We know that the debate begins with a constant: the guerrilla movement is a necessary condition for the defeat of imperialism in Latin America, and everything else is reformism. Yet immediately, a series of differences with the Cuban process comes to mind. Here are some of the important examples:

(1) A Marxist ideology is now indispensable to the struggle (which was not the case in Cuba); also an ideological struggle against reformism, now openly allied with the bourgeoisie.

(2) The war will be long and drawn out (and not short, as in Cuba), and we must work *politically* with the peasant masses because they are not "virgin territory," as they were in Cuba.

(3) The struggle will be continental in scope, which implies that the plan for national liberation parties can only serve as an initial lever for struggle but that it is important to think of a new and better organizational form.

(4) The struggle will require the creation of Marxist parties of a new type, freed from the classic structure of Stalinist formalism and possessing flexible organizational forms, parties capable of mobilizing the popular masses (including, e.g., even students in private schools, or priests) in each stage

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of the struggle, and of taking advantage of all struggles against imperialism.

It is perhaps with regard to this last aspect that the Cuban experience, as well as the Vietnamese and Chinese, offer their richest and most profound lessons, although none can, in any case, be taken as a "model."

Various political formations in Latin America are either already living the guerrilla experience or are on the verge of plunging into it; but revolutionary activity of this kind does not of itself resolve remaining theoretical problems, for which there are no "recipes" and which, being unresolved, cost lives and are not unrelated to some of the difficulties facing the development of the armed struggle in Latin America.

Thus today the debate of ideas on the Left is more necessary than ever. Silence, on the other hand, will lead only to the reinforcement of reformism, because of that reverse swing of the pendulum that any armed fiasco, actually or seemingly based on a theory, causes among the ranks and in the ideology of the revolutionary forces.

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THE MARXISM OF REGIS DEBRAY

BY ROBIN BLACKBURN
AND PERRY ANDERSON

Régis Debray has written three closely linked studies of the Latin American revolution. Together, they unquestionably constitute one of the most brilliant examples of Marxist-Leninist analysis to have appeared in many years. What above all distinguishes Debray's writings is their relentlessly Leninist focus on *making the revolution,* as a political, technical, and military problem. This is what gives them their inner unity and their unmistakable tone—a tone of burning urgency that recalls the insurrectionary debates and manifestoes of 1917. All setbacks and difficulties are seen in the perspective of the means to overcome them. They can indeed be welcomed, if the lessons they offer are learned. Revolution is on the order of the day *here and now*, even if a prodigious and costly effort will be needed to achieve it. The task of a commentator is to clarify revolutionary practice through a theoretical transformation of revolutionary experience.

In Cuba, Debray's most recent essay *Revolution in the Revolution?* has sold over 200,000 copies. Based on long discussions with Fidel, it sets out the new Cuban guerrilla tactics in Latin America. The essay appears to present an explosive, unfamiliar combination of an utterly intransigent revolutionary *ethics* and an extraordinarily detailed and concrete *technics* of insurrection. On the one hand, the whole study is written under the sign of the new categorical imperative proclaimed in Havana: "The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution." This absolute moral duty inspires every page. At the same time, the reader of *Revolution in the Revolution?* is immediately plunged into the encircled world of the practical needs and tasks of small guerrilla bands operating in the mountains and jungles of Latin America. Much of the study is devoted to discussing

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such questions as the vital importance of "a square yard of nylon cloth, a can of gun grease, a pound of salt or sugar, a pair of boots." Debray himself comments: "Seen from the outside, these are 'details,' 'material limitations' of the class struggle, the 'technical side,' the minor and hence secondary side of things." (p. 70)

The distinctive combination of revolutionary ethics and technics which characterizes *Revolution in the Revolution?* undoubtedly owes much to the specific cultural traditions which have fused in Cuba. The unyielding moral imperative to make the revolution, regardless of the dangers to the revolutionary, is very much in the tradition of Hispanic thought and feeling—its indifference to hardship and death. At the same time, the intense practicality of Che Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare* and Debray's sequel to it—the concern for the daily, concrete details of action—is visibly American in its inspiration. *Revolution in the Revolution?* is in this sense a faithful mirror of Cuban Marxism. To European or Asian readers, it is precisely this combination which may initially be disconcerting. Marxism has historically not only been an ethics and a technics: it has been a *politics*—that is, a theory of the social structure and the contradictions within it which objectively found the revolutionary movement which aims to overthrow it. Where is the political analysis which should englobe the technical program and the moral summons of the guerrilla movement?

The answer is that Debray's first two essays, "Latin America: The Long March" and "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America" provide precisely this.* They are the indispensable complement, the theoretical-political premises of the call to arms in *Revolution in the Revolution?*

In "Latin America: The Long March," Debray undertook a vast survey of the first post-1959 wave of insurrectionary initiatives in Latin America, and the reasons for their temporary arrest or defeat. He points out the novelty of the concept of the insurrectionary *foco* by contrast with the mechanical opposition

* These essays were both published in English in *New Left Review*—"Latin America" in the issue of September-October 1965; "Problems" in September-October 1967. They will appear in a forthcoming collection of Debray's essays, to be published by MR Press.

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of adventurist "putschism" and quiescent "mass action" which had traditionally dominated left politics in Latin America. Debray then sketches a vivid analysis of the impossibility of permanent urban guerrillas (based on the experience of the battle of Caracas in 1963) and the unviability of any dual command of rural guerrillas (military leaders in the country and political leaders in the towns). Calling for a unified politico-military force of insurrection in the country, he stresses that military action must always be commanded by politics. "Armed struggle understood as an art . . . is meaningless except in the framework of politics understood as a science." ("Latin America," p. 34)

Debray next proceeds to the fundamental theoretical axiom which governs the whole of his subsequent writings. The Latin American Left has always been divided in an interminable debate about the nature of the revolution to come: was it merely "bourgeois-democratic" or would it be "socialist"? The answer given to this question, of course, determined the program of the revolutionary party, and its alliances with other social forces. A controversy was centering on these issues. Debray cut right through this whole theoretical impasse with the formulation which is the fulcrum of his political analysis: *"The nub of the problem lies not in the initial program of the revolution but in its ability to resolve in practice the problem of state power before the bourgeois-democratic stage, and not after. . . . In South America the bourgeois-democratic stage presupposes the destruction of the bourgeois state apparatus."* (*ibid.*, p. 51). The enormous liberation which this peremptory axiom represents for Latin American militants will be evident to anyone who ever experienced the traditional and paralyzing debates on the continent over the "stages" of the revolution—so reminiscent of Menshevik discussion in the early years of the century. Nothing shows more clearly the authentically Leninist character of Debray's thought than this renovation of the Bolshevik strategy of 1917, when state power was seized and socialism inaugurated on a mere program of "Bread, Land, and Peace." Fidel Castro's program of 1958 was essentially similar in character: the "mildest" political platform was the prelude to the most rapid and radical socialization of the 20th century.

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In his second essay, "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America," Debray moves on to consider two crucial, continent-wide coordinates of revolutionary struggle since the Cuban Revolution. Firstly, he argues in a striking aphorism that: "Revolution revolutionizes the counter-revolution"—more immediately and effectively than the revolutionary forces themselves. ("Problems," p. 21) The lessons of Cuba, he points out, were assimilated much more quickly by the United States than by the Latin American Left. Both the United States and the local oligarchies responded with great speed to the threat of further Cubas. Drawing on parallels with Eastern Europe after 1917, Debray discusses the Alliance for Progress and the new terrific mobilization of violence which the United States launched with its counter-insurgency programs. The essay foreshadows with the utmost clarity the United States invasion of Santo Domingo, which occurred a few months after it was written.

Secondly, Debray analyzes the whole question of the existence and role of the "national bourgeoisie" in Latin America, and the fate of the reformist politics oriented towards an alliance with it. In a brilliant *tour de force,* he shows that the two divergent roads of "national bourgeois" government in Latin America inexorably lead to a single outcome: murderous counter-revolution. There has never been a better or more devastating sketch of the corrupt MNR and AD regimes in Bolivia and Venezuela—what Debray calls "Demo-bourgeois Fascism"—a bourgeois regime without a bourgeois class. Next, the class logic of the downfall of well-intentioned reforming governments—Goulart in Brazil or Arbenz in Guatemala—is analyzed in a characteristically staccato scenario. Finally, the polemic with which Debray assails the demagogy of Latin American reformism is in the best Marxist tradition. His discussion of the Chilean elections of 1964 is particularly important here, showing very clearly that Debray does not believe that guerrilla tactics are the only permissible form of struggle, while insisting that electoral illusions are the death of any revolutionary movement. "It is one thing to use a bourgeois weapon like an election in a regime of representative democracy; it is another thing to use it in a bourgeois manner." (*ibid.,* p. 32) The formula, of course, is universally valid.

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This political analysis, then, is the infrastructure of the military and technical prescriptions of *Revolution in the Revolution?* Here Debray develops the new and startling thesis that guerrillas must initially *shun* the civilian peasant population, abandon the notions of fixed guerrilla bases, "armed propaganda," and "armed self-defense," and convert themselves into swift, entirely mobile striking units aimed at knocking out the troops of repression. He grounds these arguments in an analysis of the specific conditions of Latin America—the very low density of rural population, cultural disparity between guerrillas (usually recruits from the towns) and peasants (often Indians), and the tremendous repressive power of "revolutionized" counter-revolution. Debray is concerned mainly with the military diversion of armed struggle. But although he does not believe that most of the existing political parties in Latin America are viable as revolutionary vanguards, he is emphatic that such a political vanguard is essential: it will be, precisely, the guerrilla itself. *"A guerrilla force cannot develop on the military level if it does not become a political vanguard."* (p. 108) He goes on to point out that: "If it [the guerrilla force] does not assume the functions of political leadership during the course of emancipation itself, it will not be able to assume them when the the war is over. . . . We have only to observe the difficulties in which Algeria finds itself today." (pp. 109-110)

It is important to stress that Debray is only discussing the *takeoff stage* of insurrection in Latin America here—not the whole trajectory of the revolution itself. In a key image, he constantly refers to the guerrilla force as the "small motor" which alone can set the "large motor" of the masses in motion later. He does not discuss the "large motor" as such, but the general lines of the class bloc it must involve have already been indicated in the two "political" essays, "Latin America: The Long March" and "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America," as we have seen.

One objection that has been raised to *Revolution in the Revolution?* is that it seems sometimes to lack sufficient specificity. Debray appears to be advocating the same guerrilla tactics indifferently for Argentina and Colombia, Costa Rica and Guatemala. It has thus been alleged that he ignores the varying pos-

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sibilities of revolutionary action within each individual country. Thus most Latin American countries have large urban populations and a great part of this population is neither absolutely nor relatively privileged. In Argentina, 70 percent of the population is urban—a proportion greater than in France. Brazil has no less than two cities of more than 5,000,000 and three of over 1,000,000. The destitute shanty-towns and wretched working-class districts which surround every Latin American city surely provide a social basis for some urban form of struggle. There is also the possible contribution of such traditionally militant groups as students. The revolution foreseen by Debray has thus appeared to his critics to be somewhat "under-determined," relying only on one social force (the peasantry of the remoter rural areas) and one revolutionary tactic (the guerrilla *foco*). When these objections were put to Debray in discussions in Havana, his answer was as follows: The guerrilla force was only one factor among many in the development of a revolutionary situation—students, trade unions, peasant leagues, and so on, would also undoubtedly be necessary if a revolutionary situation was to be successfully carried to its conclusion. But nevertheless there is always one dominant feature of any given historical conjuncture—what Mao calls the "principal aspect of the principal contradiction." Thus it was the action of the Bolsheviks which knit together and fused the manifold contradictions of Russian society in 1917—forging an alliance of workers and peasants symbolized by the slogan "Bread, Land, and Peace." Similarly, the party which grew out of the guerrilla force would impose its unity on the diverse and inevitably over-determined social contradictions set in motion during the revolutionary upheaval. Only in the rural backlands, however, can an effective striking force meanwhile be readied.

Replying to the criticism that he overlooks the very different social structures of Latin American countries, Debray commented that such criticisms in their turn ignore the fundamental factor of continental unity in Latin America. He made a comparison with the Wars of Independence, in the time of Bolívar. The tempo of anti-imperialist struggle was certain to grow unevenly throughout the continent. Just as certain regions like Gran Colombia had taken the lead in the wars against

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Spain, while others like Peru had been liberated as a result of victories in the neighboring provinces, so today too, vanguards would emerge in Latin America. The vanguard countries would be those most hospitable to guerrilla action. The success of the revolution in these countries would then inevitably detonate the contradictions in their neighbors. Debray indicates in "Problems of Revolutionary Strategy in Latin America" what he means by this when he criticizes the illusion of Chilean militants that their country represented such an "advanced" model that it was exempt from the general laws of the Latin American revolution today.

The debate on this question will certainly continue. Meanwhile, the conference of OLAS in Havana (August 1967) has undoubtedly helped to clarify a number of points. In a historic speech at the end of the conference, Fidel emphasized that armed insurrection is not the *only* form of revolutionary struggle, but that it is the *fundamental form*—to which all others will eventually lead. There is thus absolutely no place for reformist illusions about the nature of the state in a capitalist society, although this does not mean instantaneous armed uprising against it, regardless of the objective political conjuncture. The tempo of the revolution will vary from country to country, although its nature will be fundamentally similar. The emergence of a new "International" based on these principles is the logical outcome of this momentous conference. Neither the Cuban leaders nor Debray see any continental conflagration as a short-run probability. The struggle will be a very long one. At this stage, revolutionary practice is confined, indeed, to starting the "small motor." The "large motor" is still silent in most Latin American countries. Only when it is heard, will final success be possible. Meanwhile, the struggle must begin. "The duty of every revolutionary is to make the revolution."

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RADICAL BUT WRONG

BY EQBAL AHMAD

For someone who lacks first-hand knowledge of Latin America it appears at first difficult, if not hazardous, to comment on Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?*. The basic framework within which the book moves concerns the uniqueness of the "tactical content" of the Cuban among modern revolutions, and its importance as a model for Latin America. Debray believes that the Russian, Chinese, and Vietnamese revolutions are poor examples for South American countries because each revolution must respond to its regional and national peculiarities. Learning from foreign examples can cost dearly through the adoption of tactics unsuited to local conditions. The Latin American revolutionary war, according to Debray, "possesses highly special and profoundly distinct conditions of development which can only be discovered through a particular experience. In that sense all the theoretical works on peoples' war do as much harm as good." (p. 21) Hence, "one may well consider it a stroke of good luck that Fidel had not read the military writings of Mao Tse-tung before disembarking on the coast of Oriente." (p. 20) Since historical examples as well as the writings of the non-Latin theorists and practitioners of revolutionary warfare are rejected as irrelevant to South America, the validity of the assumptions on which Debray's theory is based may best be questioned by those who claim expertise on that region. Insofar as this theory claims to be rooted in the experience of one successful (Cuba) and several ongoing Latin revolutions, it would seem to follow that its usefulness can ultimately be judged only by those who have been and will be actively engaged in the struggle.

Eqbal Ahmad, a Pakistani who teaches at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Cornell University, spent the years 1960-1963 in North Africa.

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In undertaking to comment on his work, I am implicitly rejecting Debray's contention that specific conditions in any country or region are so unique as to transcend history and thus render irrelevant past revolutionary theory no less than practice. This does not mean, however, that I deny the importance of the congruence between tactics/strategy and local realities without which no revolutionary movement can succeed. Secondly, insofar as Debray's justification for his theory is based on the argument of the uniqueness of Latin America, his thesis is convincing only to the extent that he brings out, meaningfully, those distinctive characteristics of the region which bear on his theory.

Debray's own writings do not help in understanding the "highly special and profoundly distinct conditions" which distinguish South America from the other regions of the Third World. In an earlier, and empirically meatier, article outlining a *foco* theory, he had stated: "It remains to be demonstrated how the Castroist tactics of insurrection and take-over of power conform to the system of contradictions peculiar to each Latin American country; and how they are undoubtedly founded on the Marxist-Leninist theory."* If there is a promise implicit in *Revolution in the Revolution?*, we have a right to disappointment. In so far as Debray refers to some specific conditions in Latin America, they are so general as to apply to most Western-dominated underdeveloped countries under oligarchic rule and infested by parties and politicians whose reflexes are traditional, when not outright reactionary.

It is noteworthy that to the extent that *Revolution in the Revolution?* differs from Debray's earlier formulation of the *foco* theory, it is in the direction of greater rigidity, greater denigration of the primacy of politics, and less attention to the environment in which the *foco* may succeed. It is incorrect, I believe, to consider, as Robin Blackburn and Perry Anderson do, the two earlier essays as constituting the "indispensable comple-

* "Le Castrisme: La Longue Marche de l'Amérique Latine," *Les Temps Modernes,* January 1965. The sentence quoted above does not appear in the English version of the article: "Latin America: The Long March," *New Left Review,* September-October 1965. See also his second article, written in 1965: "Marxist Strategy in Latin America," *New Left Review,* September-October 1967.

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ment, the theoretical-political premises of the call to arms in *Revolution in the Revolution?*"* They undoubtedly foreshadow the model drawn in the book; but the *foco* theory of *Revolution in the Revolution?* differs in a fundamental manner from the one he had advocated in "Latin America: The Long March." In *Revolution in the Revolution?* the revolutionary process is inverted; in the *foco* theory published in early 1965 it was not.

In "Latin America: The Long March," (p. 30) Debray stated: (a) The *foco,* installed as a "detonator at the least guarded position and at the moment most favorable to the explosion, . . . can have no active function unless it finds a point of insertion within maturing conditions. . . . Chronologically, it cannot be born in the trough of the wave, but must be the culmination of a political crisis." (b) It must be in existence as a political organization when the appropriate moment comes. "For the prairie to catch fire, it is necessary that the spark should be there, present, waiting. The very lengthy work of building a *foco* can only be done on the spot, and only a center that is politically rooted in an agrarian zone can seize the offensive at the appropriate moment." (*ibid.,* p. 30) (c) "The *foco,* at the beginning, can only survive to the extent to which it obtains the support of the peasantry: the center is welded to the milieu, congenitally." In *Revolution in the Revolution?,* Debray ignores or denies these principles.

His discussion in "Latin America: The Long March" of the causes of the failures of important guerrilla centers in Latin America (he lists eleven between 1959 and 1964) as well as his description of the "gains" (Bolivia, Colombia, Venezuela) tended to reinforce his belief in the primacy of politics at all stages of revolution. He listed four causes of failure: (1) treachery by enemy infiltrators; (2) absence or deficiency of political education of cadres; (3) lack of political apparatus to coordinate with the urban workers, to provide political support, and to diffuse a program of action and basic demands; and (4) lack of adequate preparation on the spot.

Elaborating on the last point, Debray contrasts the successful case of Venezuela where the District of Bachiller ("one

* See p. 63.

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hour by road from Caracas") had seen the "installation of a social, economic, and political infrastructure on the basis of existing political structure long in advance of the launching of the guerrilla center properly speaking. Further, this guerrilla action did not break out haphazardly but at the exact moment (July, 1964) when the Leoni regime had demonstrated by its actions that the 'broadly based government' was betraying its promises and that repression was acquiring a new lease of life in the country." ("Latin America," p. 33) In *Revolution in the Revolution?,* Debray denies to the *foco* in its formative period precisely these aspects of revolutionary preparation.

Similarly, Castro's and Guevara's well-known opinion on the impossibility of exporting revolutions is ignored. To the contrary, Debray argues that the fact that peasants may regard the *foco* as a foreign element among them requires that guerrillas remain, at first, aloof from the population. There is no discussion of Che Guevara's earlier contention that guerrilla insurgency cannot succeed against a government which is able to maintain some legitimacy through the pretense of democracy. Yet Debray's tactical model is in accord with Che Guevara's effort in Bolivia. Hence his shift deserves attention, and explanation. There is a note of urgency, a sense of immediacy in his book. Perhaps it results from a concern to divide United States strength, and thus help the Vietnamese people. After Vietnam the United States might turn to Cuba out of frustration, or intoxicated by a Pyrrhic victory; hence the need to find allies on the continent. Above all, the setbacks suffered by the revolutionary sectors in Colombia and Bolivia and the losses in Venezuela may have been the most crucial factors in hardening Debray's convictions in behalf of an armed, mobile *foco* independent of party and population.

In 1965, as Debray surveyed a succession of guerrilla movements, only 3 out of 14 main centers appeared promising. Of these, one (Bolivia) seemed to him to be closer to the Bolshevik model. Bolivia, he noted, is "the country where the subjective and objective conditions are best combined . . . the only country in South America where a socialist revolution is on the agenda . . . where the revolution might take a Bolshevik form. . . . The theory of the *foco* is thus in Bolivia, for reasons of his-

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torical formation which are unique in America, if not inadequate at any rate secondary." ("Latin America," pp. 26-27) Another (Colombia) appeared comparable to Vietnam ("where civil war has given the guerrilla its Vietnamese character . . . peasants are at the same time cultivators of their land and *guerrilleros*"). (*ibid.*, p. 27) "Only Venezuela," he said, "provides an example of the *foco* as Guevara conceives it." Very little in contrast with the failures! The high mortality rate, Debray explained, was "due to a too hasty imitation of the Cuban model, and did not combine all the necessary conditions for success." (*ibid.*)

The collapse of the Bolivian miners' resistance and the defeat of the autonomous zone of Marquetalia in Colombia give Debray his strongest arguments against the imitation of extra-Latin American models, and in favor of the *foco* derived from the Cuban model. "This double defeat," he says, "signifies the end of an epoch and attests to the death of a certain ideology." (*Revolution,* p. 27) He makes out a convincing case against armed self-defense, and points out that in Colombia and Bolivia, armed zones of peasants' and workers' self-defense were defeated with substantial losses to the population. He writes poignantly of the tragic isolation of Bolivian miners in revolt: in a hostile, cold, arid milieu, the scattered miners were starved, surrounded, and subjugated, one isolated community after another. Unless it results from guerrilla victory and is protected by a mobile front, a self-defense zone will be isolated and destroyed or, left to itself, will be institutionalized and atrophied. "The failure of armed self-defense of the masses," says Debray, "corresponds on the military level to the failure of reformism on the political level." (*ibid.*, p. 27) No one should argue that the creation of base areas is a viable strategy until a situation of substantial mass mobilization and the possibility of creating multiple points of pressure has been developed. However, Debray misses an important point when he concludes that these failures leave only one alternative, the military *foco*. Their defeat was due to the fact that both zones were isolated pockets lacking nationwide popular and organizational (including armed) support. A *foco* is as vulnerable to destruction in isolation as rural or industrial base areas. Hence, detonation of a

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foco, too, must occur, as Debray had earlier acknowledged, with reference "to a dialectical analysis of its revolutionary possibilities." More importantly, the residual effects of the defeat of a *foco* are likely to be less favorable to accelerating the revolutionary processes than the failures of organized mass resistance, even when they are isolated.

Cuba under Batista is assumed to represent conditions analogous to the rest of Latin America with the exception, perhaps, of Uruguay, the only country Debray identifies as one where "conditions for armed struggle do not exist at present." (*ibid.*, p. 124)* He does not, however, tell us what these "conditions" are, or why Uruguay constitutes an exception. He speaks of but does not discuss the "objective and subjective" conditions of revolution. The existence of objective conditions is assumed, as is the commonality of political, social, and economic configurations in Latin America (though, from his examples, it appears that he is concerned mainly with the Andean region). The formation of subjective conditions, he presumes, will be hastened by the creation of guerrilla *focos.*

More disappointing is Debray's admitted inability to come to grips with the Cuban revolution. In the introduction to *Revolution in the Revolution?* (pp. 15-16) he decries the current clichés, the "flagrant oversights," the "conjuring trick" of "reducing" Cuba to a "golden legend"; and he makes a passionate plea against overlooking "the essential, the complex reality of the Cuban insurrectional process," its "inner working," its " 'how' . . . rather than its surface glitter." But, he adds with characteristic integrity, the "continuing lack of a detailed history

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* Note that Che Guevara pointed out at least five distinctive features of the Cuban setting: (1) Castro's personality. (2) Absence of intervention by the United States which failed to fathom the genuinely far-reaching aspects of the Cuban Revolution. (3) Batista's regime had lost legitimacy almost completely so that even the bourgeoisie supported the revolution and many landlords were neutral. (4) Majority of peasants were progressively proletarianized by the expansion of large, mechanized capitalist farms. (5) Emergence of a class of disaffected middle-peasants in the Sierra Maestra. See "Cuba—Exception or Vanguard" in *Venceremos: The Speeches and Writings of Che Guevara,* edited by John Gerassi, New York 1968, pp. 132-134.

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of the Cuban insurrectional process . . . constrains us to reduce our references to allusions whereas what is needed is a systematic investigation."

On the basis of these allusions and in the absence of any systematic comparisons between Cuba and other Latin American nations, we are given a certain prescription for revolution which inverts the usual process of revolutionary warfare, flies in the face of past theory no less than practice, and even contradicts the earlier views of America's most articulate theorist of revolutionary war, Che Guevara.

The core of Debray's tactical model is his stress on the primacy of the military *foco* (a word used to describe the unitary focus of guerrilla operation) in the formative stages of an armed revolution. He believes that only a mobile, flexible, aggressive *foco* can create the conditions for gaining mass support and for political organizing. By inflicting losses on government forces it will subvert the legitimacy of the system, end the peasants' habit of obedience to it, and eventually provide the protective shield necessary for organizing the mass. Successful military action "catalyzes the people's energy and transforms the *foco* into a pole of attraction." (*Revolution,* p. 45) The best form of political work is armed attack on the enemy. Debray states: "The destruction of a troop transport truck or the public execution of a police torturer is more effective propaganda than a hundred speeches. . . . The agitational and propagandistic impact resides in this very concentration of effects. A significant detail: *during two years of warfare, Fidel did not hold a single political rally in his zone of operations.*" (*ibid.,* pp. 53-54, italics added)

He draws a contrast with Vietnam: "Whereas in Vietnam the military pyramid of the liberation forces is built from the base up, in Latin America . . . it tends to be built from the apex down—the permanent forces first (the *foco*), then the semi-regular forces in the vicinity of the *foco,* and lastly or after victory (Cuba) the militia." (*ibid.,* p. 51) This, Debray rightly claims, is a radical departure from the insurrectional process observable in China, Vietnam, and Algeria; it also inverts the theories of such men as Mao, Giap, and even Lenin. This view leads to the reversal of the stages of development

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not only in the military but also in the political and organizational aspects of revolutionary warfare. The incumbent government is outfought before it is outadministered. The military factor takes precedence over the political. Tactical considerations must precede questions of overall strategy. Political parties cannot initiate the guerrilla movement; rather, the guerrillas later galvanize into a party, and establish a socialist state. The guerrilla (operational) and political leadership must be combined in the same man.

Debray argues cogently against guerrilla base areas whose establishment demands a combination of favorable circumstances —extensive territory without modern roads and rails, high population density, common border with a friendly country, weak enemy air power, numerical weakness of government forces—none of which is present in Latin America. Hence during "the initial stage, the base support is in the guerrilla fighter's knapsack." (*ibid.*, p. 65) The only viable alternative, in his view, is the mobile *foco* "independent of the civilian population, in action as well as in military organization; consequently it need not assume the direct defense of the peasant population. The protection of the population depends on the progressive destruction of the enemy's military potential; . . . if the principal objective of a revolutionary guerrilla force is the destruction of the enemy's potential, it cannot wait for the enemy to approach before taking the initiative. . . . In every case this objective requires that the guerrilla *foco* be independent of the families residing within the zone of operations." (*ibid.*, pp. 41-42)

Debray's *foco* theory does not reject organic ties with the civilians simply for fear of exposing them to governmental repression, although this is undoubtedly the most attractive aspect of his position. Nor is it only a matter of concern with achieving maximum mobility and initiative. One senses something deeper and disturbing—an awareness of distance from if not exactly a distrust of the rural population, an unadmitted estimation that the objective conditions for revolution do not exist in Latin America, total disbelief in the political processes and existing political parties as possible instruments for independence and social revolution, and above all a desperate drive to create the

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revolutionary environment through armed action and thus to defeat the increasing involvement of the United States.

The *foco* is not only organically distinct but is also isolated from the population. Says Debray: "Various considerations of common sense necessitate wariness toward the civilian population and the maintenance of a certain aloofness (*ibid.,* p. 42)) (he explains, however, that "this vigilance does not necessarily mean mistrust"). This feeling of isolation, as well as his estimation of the revolutionary environment, are most clearly expressed in the chapter on "Armed Propaganda." The *foco* begins in sparsely populated, highly dispersed regions because, he says, "no new arrival goes unnoticed in an Andean village. . . . Above all else, a stranger inspires distrust. The Quechua or Cakchiquel (Mayan) peasants have good reason to distrust the 'outsider,' the 'white man.' . . ." (*ibid.,* p. 51)

While arguing against involvement in political work among peasants, Debray indicates that the local governments enjoy legitimacy (he does not use this word—I am using it in the passive sense of legitimacy by tradition or by default) in the rural areas, while peasants regard the revolutionaries as alien. These passages are crucial to understanding his theory and deserve to be discussed at length:

> The poor peasant believes, first of all, in anyone who has a certain power, beginning with the power to do what he says. The system of oppression is subtle: it has existed from time immemorial, fixed, entrenched, and solid. The army, the *guardia rural,* the *latifundista's* private police, or nowadays the Green Berets and Rangers, enjoy a prestige all the greater for being subconscious. This prestige constitutes the principal form of oppression. . . . The neocolonial ideal is still to show force in order not to have to use it, but to show it is in effect to use it. (*ibid.,* p. 51)

The guerrillas are not dealing in Latin America "with a foreign expeditionary force, with limited manpower, but with a well established system of local domination. *They themselves are the foreigners, lacking status, who at the beginning offer the populace nothing but bloodshed and pain.*" (*ibid.,* p. 52, italics added)

Also, incumbent regimes have been greatly improving their control, facilities, instruments of repression, and even their ad-

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justive mechanisms. Highways have greatly expanded, skirting the jungle and linking up countries and capitals; airstrips spot the formerly impenetrable tropical zones. North American sociologists and economists have been mapping out man and his milieu in detail, making available to their governmental employers hitherto unknown information. "Thousands of Peace Corpsmen have succeeded in integrating themselves in rural areas—some of them by dint of hard work, patience, and at times real sacrifice—where they profit by the lack of political work by left-wing organizations. Even the most remote regions are today teeming with Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist, and Seventh-Day Adventist missionaries. In a word, all these close-knit networks of control strengthen the national machinery of domination." (*ibid.*, p. 53) And of course there are the special forces trained and equipped for counter-insurgency.

Three interdependent points emerge from these quotations: (1) Debray's high estimation of the entrenched nature and increasing effectiveness of government control in rural areas; (2) his stress on power rather than on the revolutionary process, and the concomitant belief that the peasants' acceptance of government is based mainly on fear of its coercive apparatus; (3) his view that the revolutionary elite is considered alien by the peasantry, and that there is between them no commonality of interest on the basis of which a political tie-up could occur. I do not know much about Latin America. Therefore, I cannot judge the validity of these assumptions. Yet, it seems to me that so pessimistic a perspective of the environment drastically reduces one's political options to a choice between cooptation and a tactic born of despair. Those not inexorably committed to seizure of power for the sake of transforming society, would probably seek different routes to sharing it. On the other hand, given the above estimation of the revolutionary environment, the *foco* is the only logical alternative for those who are unwilling to be compromised with the existing order.

The belief that peasant co-operation with the government results from the fear of its coercive power leads logically to the primacy of the military *foco* as a means for subverting the government's legitimacy. As Debray says, "Unassailability cannot be challenged by words. In order to destroy the idea of

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unassailability—that age old accumulation of fear and humility vis-à-vis the *patrono,* the policeman, the *guardia rural*—there is nothing better than combat." (*ibid.,* p. 52) The feeling of isolation, of being considered alien by the peasantry, must necessarily mean that guerrillas, for their own survival, must avoid the populace until they believe they have proved their armed superiority over incumbent forces. Hence Debray's initial rejection of political work, including "armed propaganda," in villages; hence, too, the deep fear of betrayal, suspicion of every liaison man (peasant or guerrilla) as a potential traitor, and the three "golden rules"—constant vigilance, constant mistrust, constant mobility. (Contrast these with the famous Three Tasks of the Army, the Three Main Rules of Discipline, and Eight Points of Attention.*) A combination of the three views understandably produces a theory of revolutionary despair which relegates politics to a secondary position; says Debray: "The main point is that under present conditions the most important form of propaganda is military action. . . . Given the social, ideological, and psychological conditions of the peasantry in the majority of Latin American countries, given the diverse intelligence agencies at the enemy's disposal (strongly reinforced since the Cuban Revolution), an agitational group, whether armed or not, will be watched, uncovered and liquidated; in embryo if necessary." (*ibid.,* p. 56)

Debray's arguments regarding the relationship between parties and the guerrillas are predictable. All forms of reformism have failed in South America and any political line which "is not susceptible to expression as a precise and consistent military line, cannot be considered revolutionary." (*ibid.,* p. 24) "Who will make the revolution in South America? Who?" asks Castro, and replies: "The people, the revolutionaries, with or without a

* This refers to the organizing and disciplinary principles of the Chinese Army of Liberation which, with slight variations, were also adopted by the Algerian and Vietnamese Liberation movements. They are: The Three Tasks of the Army—fighting, politics, and production. The Three Main Rules of Discipline—obey orders, do not take a single needle from the masses, turn in captured articles. The Eight Points of Attention—speak politely, pay fairly for your purchase, return borrowed things, compensate for damages, do not hit or swear at people, do not damage crops, do not take liberties with women, do not mistreat prisoners.—Ed.

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party." (*ibid.,* p. 98) Debray charges that Communist parties in Latin America lack the tradition, courage, and leadership to think about a seizure of power. Like other legal organizations, they suffer from bureaucratization, obsessive pursuit of alliances and political bargaining, electoral maneuvers, old-style leadership, and traditional ideological reflexes. As they are constituted today they are unfit for the "New Dialectic of Tasks."

The setting up of military, not political, *focos* is seen as decisive for the future; and this task cannot be entrusted, Debray argues at length, to a party or front which, being urban based is neither politically nor organizationally nor morally equipped to direct the guerrillas. "In most countries where conditions for armed struggle exist it is possible to move from a military *foco* to a political *foco* but to move in the opposite direction is virtually impossible." (*ibid.,* p. 120) The party, then, cannot create or lead the guerrilla force. Rather, the guerrilla force under a centralized command will beget an eventual party: "The vanguard party can exist in the form of the guerrilla *foco* itself. The guerrilla force is the party in embryo." (*ibid.,* p. 106) Debray seems very confident that the *foco* forms the natural nucleus for the development of party; his arguments are sadly reminiscent of the earnest, confident assertions and promises one heard in Ghardimou and Oujda from officers and men of the Algerian Liberation Army.

Debray's rhapsodizing about the virtues of life in the mountain, its liberating, resuscitating effects on man—"class egoism does not long endure"; "petty-bourgeois psychology melts like snow under the summer sun"; "bureaucratic faintheartedness becomes irrelevant"; "where better than in the guerrilla army could this shedding of skin and this resurrection take place?" (*ibid.,* pp. 110 and *passim*)—is familiar; his sense of wonderment at the courage and self-sacrifice of the guerrillas is understandable. But personal virtues and even group experiences do not easily transfer to national and public institutions. And it is too sweeping to say: "When the guerrilla army assumes the prerogatives of political leadership, it is responding to its class content and anticipating tomorrow's dangers. It alone can guarantee that the people's power will not be perverted after victory. . . ." (*ibid.,* p. 109)

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A thousand or so guerrillas did not make possible Cuba's transition from liberation to socialism; the post-liberation alliance with the Communists probably did. Today the specter of a stagnant, bureaucratizing Algeria under the Liberation Army haunts us. Without an operative commitment to a functioning and consistent ideology, and without institutions that would insure a degree of adherence to the principle of accountability, even guerrilla leaders can degenerate into self-seeking politicians, or the people's army can become a self-perpetuating junta.

As a theory *Revolution in the Revolution?* is radical but wrong. It corresponds closely to the theory of revolutionary warfare favored in Washington. It views revolutionary war, "in its formative stages," essentially in military terms. The civilian population is ignored until after a certain success has been achieved. Government's legitimacy is viewed in terms of coercion; hence military action becomes the chief instrument of subversion. The revolutionaries, considered "outsiders" by the population, tend to view the civilians as spectators who will join the winning side.

In places the coincidence of official American opinions with Debray's formulations is startling. When W. W. Rostow made his famous statement that the guerrilla force enjoyed considerable advantage over the government because "its task is merely to destroy while the government must build and protect," those who knew something about revolutionary warfare laughed at him. Debray, to my knowledge, is the first revolutionary writer to agree with Rostow, albeit inadvertently: "The government must, since it is the government, protect everywhere the interests of the property owners; the *guerrilleros* do not have to protect anything anywhere." (*ibid.*, p. 75)

These similarities between a revolutionary and counter-revolutionary theory are not coincidental. They stem from the fact that both start with the same basic assumptions about the nature of guerrilla warfare. Debray's *foco*, I am afraid, is a tailor's fit for the American counter-insurgency program. Che Guevara's Bolivian campaign was an example of the pitfalls of the *foco* theory; it also proved how successful counter-insurgency can be against this kind of adventure. I should quote Debray with strong agreement: "When the list of martyrs grows long,

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when every act of courage is converted into martyrdom, it is because something is wrong. And it is just as much a moral duty to seek out the causes as it is to pay homage to the murdered, imprisoned comrades." (*ibid.*, p. 86)

When all criticisms have been made, the many virtues of *Revolution in the Revolution?* ought to be underlined. Despite its faults as a theory of revolution, it is an important book, and not only as the latest formulation of Castroism. Its most remarkable qualities—deep commitment, stirring romanticism, concern with the transformation of men into humane, poetic, heroic figures—will have a timeless appeal. As an expression of the thirst for freedom from United States domination, the search for sovereignty and social justice, it is a touchstone of Latin aspirations. Its rejection of traditional leftist parties as instruments of self-seeking politicians will appeal to the youth alienated by the sad performance of their elders, for Latin America had its share of co-optable rebels. (One is reminded that such prominent figures as Victor Haya de La Torre, A. Alberto Lleras Camargo, and Rómulo Betancourt were active members of Communist and Socialist cells formed in the 1920's.) Above all, the tactical model which Debray eloquently outlines undoubtedly has a certain congruence with the psychological make-up and political culture of Latin America. One is reminded of the sacrificial heroisms of the Spanish Civil War, of bullfights and matadors. There is the stress on individuals as units of action, the passion for living heightening the fascination with death, a profound sense of loneliness, enormous courage, and unrelenting heroism. In this cultural symmetry lies perhaps the strength and popularity of *Revolution in the Revolution?* Therein, too, lies the assurance that the legend of Che Guevara will grow among the people of Latin America and take its place second only to Bolívar's.

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DEBRAY: BLACK POWER AND STUDENT POWER

BY WILLIAM A. WILLIAMS

Despite the romanticism that pervades it (and at times reduces its argument to wishful thinking), this book makes a significant contribution to the contemporary debate among radicals about revolutionary strategy and tactics. It carries a devastating critique of Communist Party behavior in Latin America, offers a concrete proposal for socialist revolutionary strategy, and no doubt presents a partial statement of Fidel Castro's thinking on those subjects.

But it is also relevant, and perhaps even more so, for citizens of the United States who are thinking seriously about what is happening in their own country, and what they ought to be doing in response. It ought to be read very closely, *and thought about very carefully,* by three groups: by those who view themselves as actual or potential American revolutionaries; by those radicals and left-liberals who are increasingly disturbed by the ineffectiveness of their traditional modes of action; and by the presidents of those large universities that are integrated into the corporate system, the mayors and other functionaries of large cities, and leaders of the federal government.

Debray's thesis about the viability of guerrilla warfare is based on the premise, never discussed, that much of Latin America is ripe for social revolution. His failure to explain what precise conditions create that readiness is apt to be overlooked in the willingness of many observers, conservative as well as radical, to grant the proposition. But the omission becomes very important if and when an attempt is made, as it has been made, to transfer Debray's analysis to other countries.

Mr. Williams is presently a member of the Department of History, Oregon State University. He is the author of numerous books, most recently *The Great Evasion* (Quadrangle), and is currently completing a diplomatic history of the period 1865-1901.

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For his argument clearly requires a situation in which a largely agrarian populace and economy surround a few metropolitan centers. A good many of his young American admirers seem to have overlooked the lack of correspondence between that basis for his argument and the actual conditions in the United States.

But granted the situation in Latin America, Debray explains the dearth of successful revolutions by pointing out the weaknesses in other strategies. Local armed outbreaks against intolerable conditions are "wasted heroism . . . leading anywhere except to the conquest of political power." Trotskyist and Maoist uprisings are failures in which "the masses are the scapegoats." As for the Communist Parties, against which Debray directs his most devastating attacks, he argues quite correctly that they have simply ceased to be revolutionary parties.

Debray's solution calls for insurrectionary activity by guerrilla radicals determined to make an avowedly socialist revolution. Such overt resistance in the countryside, he argues, will convert radicals into true and determined revolutionaries, educate and engage the heretofore ignorant, fearful, and apathetic populace, and create a mobile strategic striking force capable of defeating the army of the oligarchy. That process, furthermore, will transform an initially small guerrilla band into a broad social and political movement capable of making a revolution as well as winning a military victory.

Juan Bosch has raised (in *The New York Review of Books*, October 26, 1967) one of the central questions concerning Debray's thesis as it bears on Latin America; namely, can an avowedly socialist guerrilla force, operating almost exclusively in the backward agrarian sector of the political economy, create a social movement capable of imagining and carrying through a truly socialist revolution? Debray provides no convincing evidence or logic that it can be done that way. He offers instead a crunching critique of existing radicalism, and an impassioned moral imperative to act on a romanticized promise of success.

Those three elements of Debray's message have evoked—directly and indirectly—a strong response from one group of young Americans. Debray says explicitly that it is the young

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who will have to take up the struggle, and he presents a fuzzy but rosy picture of the way in which what the SDS once called "participatory democracy" will produce a revolutionary social movement.

At the moment, the direct actionists and the disruptionists, along with the less militant members of the Black Power and student power movements, have about as much relation to Debray's vision as does the "armed spontaneity" that he criticizes.

The ghetto Negroes and the students, for example, have no vision of a socialist commonwealth, let alone the beginnings of serious proposals to create and govern such a society. Furthermore, they are operating in the cities (or the once small towns become lardy with expanded university enrollments); and Debray warns pointedly that "one does not vanquish the bourgeoisie on its own terrain." He also points out, quite correctly, that a guerrilla movement "must have the support of the masses or disappear," and the existing pattern of disruption and violence has not won that sustenance.

But it would be both stupid and foolish for either those who run the existing system, or those who hope to effect major reforms in it, to take much satisfaction from those past and present weaknesses in the American protest and resistance movements. One does not have to read Debray, for example, to figure out the way to put real pressure on a city controlled by a white coalition that refuses to effect relevant reforms. That solution is simple and terrifying: get out of the ghetto and sabotage the water, fuel, and sewage systems, and interdict and destroy the food and other supplies upon which city life depends.

That is not guerrilla warfare according to Debray's model of creating a mobile strategic striking force capable of defeating the national army. But that is not really the point. Once one breaks free of the confines of classic revolutionary thought, as Debray has done, the next step is to see that it may not be necessary to engage the regular army controlled by the oligarchy of an advanced industrial state on any sustained or final basis. That possibility points up the gravest weaknesses of contemporary revolutionary (and non-revolutionary radical) thought in industrial societies. It is city thought, and it is largely segregated

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thought. In order to apply effective force on the metropolitan pressure points of an industrial oligarchy, while avoiding confrontations with the army on its own terms, the radicals have to be racially integrated and they have to win the support and acquiescence of the non-city population.

In a real sense, therefore, Debray's great emphasis on operating in the hinterland raises a wholly neglected question for such radicals. How does one win over the non-city masses?

That point serves to dramatize Debray's most seminal remark: "It is not the answers that must be changed, but the questions themselves."

In a very real sense, the initiative in the United States is going to go to whichever group first understands and acts on that proposition. The issue for college presidents and faculties, for example, is not how to devise new ways to control dissident and disruptive students who oppose recruiting by Dow Chemical or the armed forces (including the CIA). If they go that way, they will destroy their universities as universities, even though they may manage to keep them operating as glorified vocational schools for the corporations and the government. The new question that must be asked and answered is how to reassert the independence, the integrity, and the values of the university per se.

The same kind of shift in attitude and thought must also be made within every other major institution in contemporary American society. If that is not done, then there is a very serious probability that some readers of Debray will do even better in adapting him to North America than he has done in adapting classical revolutionary thought to Latin America.

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REGIS DEBRAY: HISTORICAL TRUTHS AND HISTORICAL ABERRATIONS

BY DONALD McKELVEY

The dialectic of history (and therefore of knowledge) often dictates that in the midst of important struggles basic truths be articulated broadly, sometimes even crudely. Such is the case with Régis Debray's *Revolution in the Revolution?*, whose character as a semi-official statement of the views of the *fidelista* revolutionaries of Cuba make it an extraordinarily important document.

A struggle of historic significance for control of the Left is occurring in Latin America between those who would emphasize primarily legal, city-based action, and those who emphasize armed guerrilla warfare. In *Revolution in the Revolution?* Debray assumes the primacy of armed struggle, and concentrates on arguing that guerrilla movements must be controlled by the guerrillas themselves, rather than by city-based political parties (i.e., by Latin American Communist Parties).

The most important section of this article will be devoted to a critical examination of one aspect of Debray's book which he clearly feels is secondary but which I think is so fundamental that it warrants the closest scrutiny: the historical function of a political party in the Latin American revolutionary movement, and indeed in *any* revolutionary movement. But *in no way do I disagree with Debray's main points,* as I have summarized them. The correct form of struggle in Latin America today, and in all the poor countries victimized by imperialism, is the development among the masses (which means in the countryside) of popular revolutionary and ultimately socialist movements, a development that will clearly involve violent struggle by guerrilla

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Donald McKelvey is a member of the Radical Education Project, an independent education, research, and publication program with headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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forces. A popular revolution must be centered where a majority of the population is to be found; without a close relationship with the masses, built on long experience and contact and on common struggle, any future revolutionary government will have to resort to coercive and manipulative measures once state power is won. Such a course means the death of the revolution.

As to Debray's second main point: For moral, political, and tactical reasons, it is clear that any struggle must be controlled by those who are doing the struggling. If the reader doubts this, let him reflect on the full meaning of participatory democracy. With respect to guerrilla struggle specifically, *Revolution in the Revolution?* presents much sound reasoning that buttresses this democratic principle.

Guerrillas and Peasants

Debray has some very important and helpful things to say about the development of the relationship between guerrillas and peasant masses. First of all, he provides a healthy antidote to the romantically revolutionary view that struggling guerrillas are immediately taken in hand by the solidly revolutionary peasantry. Debray tells us instead that guerrilla bands in various Latin American countries have frequently been betrayed by peasants they thought they could trust (including one incident in which the intentions of a well-trusted peasant guide were discovered only shortly before he would have killed Fidel). In addition, Debray makes the even more valuable point that, for reasons of the peasants' as well as the guerrillas' safety, while territory is controlled by the forces of oppression, the guerrilla band should be extremely discreet in its relations with the peasants. Contacts with individual peasants should be made clandestinely, outside the village; mass meetings in villages should appear "forced" so that when the government forces come around the peasants can all claim that their attendance was coerced; on entering a village, guerrillas should stop at all houses so that no one peasant appears to be getting special attention; in short, peasants are, in Debray's apt phrase, "eternal victims-by-substitution," and the guerrillas must be aware of this. (William Hinton, in *Fanshen*, recounts similarly careful discretion on the part of the Chinese Communist Party in an

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area not yet securely liberated from the Kuomintang forces.)

Elsewhere, however, Debray, like the rest of us, refers to the guerrilla-peasant relationship as very close. Such relationships do develop, of course, as in China and Cuba, but the problem is that Debray does not tell us in any specific terms at all of how this occurs. In part the solidarity is a result of success, but even more importantly it is a cause of success. And while each of us can envision in general terms the developing guerrilla-peasant relationship and its impediments, a more exact understanding of this dialectical development awaits either direct experience (not likely to be granted us North Americans) or (less satisfactory) an account of others' experiences which has the day-to-day reporting quality of Hinton's *Fanshen*.*

Learning from the Experience of Others

Near the beginning of the book Debray makes the entirely valid point that mechanical copying of others' experiences is likely to do great harm to a fledgling guerrilla force. Later on, however, he both distorts this principle and ignores it. The distortion takes the form of treating others' experiences as of no value at all. This in effect is his position on China and Vietnam: he admires their revolutionary successes but believes that they have little to teach Latin Americans. But in the case of Cuba he forgets his principle altogether, treating the Cuban revolutionary experience as a valid prototype for all Latin America. What Debray *fails* to say is that while one should avoid mechanical copying of others' experiences, one can and should: (1) recognize that some general principles have universal validity for socialist revolutionaries; (2) study others' experiences and seek to draw from them lessons relevant to one's own situation; and (3) understand general models and be prepared to apply them in a tentative and experimental way.

Debray's dismissal of others' experience as a revolutionary guideline is revealed in an aside: "One may well consider it a stroke of luck that Fidel had not read the military writings of Mao Tse-tung before disembarking on the coast of Oriente" (an observation, incidentally, which ignores that Mao's "military"

* *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village*, MR Press, New York, 1966.

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writings are fundamentally political). The notion of having no preconceived notions whatsoever leads, in *Revolution in the Revolution?*, to a celebration of tactics and an ignoring of basic political and strategic questions.

The Role of the Party

In polemicizing against the many evils committed by citified ideologues in the development of the Latin American revolution, Debray has in effect thrown the baby (or, better put, the tub) out with the bathwater. Because he is so caught up with the particular historical circumstance that the political parties of the Latin American Left have been singularly unrevolutionary, he attempts to make universal a particular political point, with potentially disastrous consequences: Implicitly and unjustifiably, he applies to political parties *in general* the justified criticisms of a particular genus of political party.

In seeking to liberate the Latin American Left from the unhappy influence of its various national Communist Parties, Debray subordinates political tasks to military tasks. Or, rather, he so overcompensates that he fails to discuss genuinely political tasks at all, except in the most general terms in a very limited portion of the book. The overemphasis on tactics is one aspect of this: the quote about Fidel's not reading Mao is incredible in itself and even more so when you notice, immediately following it, a statement that Fidel and his comrades discovered, when they *did* read Mao, that they had developed a *modus operandi* very much like Mao's. There is a difference between the necessity to learn through one's own experience and the making of one's own mistakes, and the jettisoning of all previous experience.

Debray says, in one of his most important summary statements: "The people's army will be the nucleus of the party, not vice versa." On one level he is correct: the struggle cannot, and should not, be directed by those not involved in it. But he is fundamentally wrong in failing even to *discuss* the central role of the party: that of political direction and political education. This failure is a basic fault in Debray's book, especially since he speaks constantly about political parties and their transgressions, and says that the party's functions must be taken over by the

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guerrillas. But what are these functions? Can they be performed by just anyone? Again, the overemphasis on tactics: the aspect of a party's function that he mentions almost exclusively is the tactical direction of the struggle. But what he fails to say is that this is only one part of the whole function, and a relatively unimportant part at that.

At issue here is the question of how consciousness develops among the masses. Debray has been accused of elitism, of believing that revolutionary change will come about solely or primarily through the efforts of the guerrilla band, and not through the development of a mass movement. I find this criticism misdirected. It is more likely that Debray believes that consciousness develops spontaneously, and that therefore a strongly political party is unnecessary. In this connection he refers to the Cuban experience as compared with the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences, both of which have included a dominant role for the Communist Party. But it is no criticism of Fidel Castro to point out that while he and his comrades were engaged in revolutionary struggle for years, the Chinese and Vietnamese were (and are) engaged in struggle for decades, literally decades, before taking state power. Furthermore, the Cuban experience is *not* prototypical for Latin America. Never again will the United States allow a Cuban-type revolution to "just happen," as it did in the Cuban case: this has been amply demonstrated.

It is precisely one's uncertainty about Debray's view of the development of political consciousness that is disturbing: an entire book on how to make revolution, and scarcely an explicit word on the development of political consciousness!

But maybe, and this has been suggested also, Debray is not writing a primer on revolution in general but intends to concentrate on the very difficult task of mere survival during the initial stage of establishing a revolutionary base. Maybe so, but if this is the case he should make it very clear. Instead he—and the Cubans too—allows the reader to draw the conclusion that there is something very close to *the* gospel on Latin American revolution. One can only conclude that he thinks that as long as the guerrillas survive everything will be all right.

Revolution in the Revolution? is in fact a *very* narrow

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book, for it concentrates on a very limited period of time in the revolutionary process. This does not make it bad or worthless —quite the contrary. But it is a vast mistake, an historical aberration, to attempt to apply universally the truths and lessons of that limited period.

For Debray's statement on guerrilla-party relations quoted above, I would substitute: "The *experience* gained through activity in the people's army will provide the basis from which *some* members of the army will form the nucleus of the party, whose role is to give basic direction to the struggle." This is a more precise formulation of the relationship between revolutionary action and revolutionary political work; it recognizes clearly that politically-determined strategy directs day-to-day activity and puts it in perspective. It is one thing to say what is absolutely true—that experience, action, struggle are the *sine qua non* for the development of political consciousness. But it is quite another thing to say that these are the only, or even always the primary forms of political education.

There are two other aspects of the role of a political party, i.e., of the people whose tasks are the determination of strategic direction and the enhancement of political consciousness. One aspect can best be examined in the light of the Cultural Revolution in China, a process of fundamental significance for any revolutionary; the other I would like to consider in relation to the radical movement in the United States.

The actions and writings of the Chinese make clear their strong emphasis on the party as an active political force which sums up, crystallizes, and directs the experience of the Chinese people. As I said above, a very serious situation can develop if the party fails to remain in the closest possible contact with the masses: the rulers will develop coercive and manipulative techniques of governing; more important, because more insidious, those rulers, lacking confidence in the masses, will *fail* to be constantly encouraging the masses to take the most active part possible in the running of every aspect of their lives. The most important of the charges against Liu Shao-chi and many others in the Chinese Communist Party is precisely their failure to encourage the masses' active involvement. The dead weight of the entire history of the human race lies heavily upon us, a

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history characterized by nature's tyranny of necessity and man's tyranny of class: *We do not believe in man (ourselves), and in the possibility of achieving democracy and participation.* This is as true of us in the "advanced" countries as of the inhabitants of countries impoverished by imperialism.

A political party leading a revolution, as in Cuba or China, has a very definite, and extremely important political task: to fight against man's history and consequent psychology, by making the strongest possible effort to involve the masses in the running of society. It is from undertaking this task that the Cultural Revolution in China derives its immense importance: the Cultural Revolution is the most far-reaching such effort in the history of socialist power. Superficially, and at one level, it is *against* the Communist Party itself (and all others with power who fail to use it to activate the masses), but only in the sense of strengthening the party by emphasizing its members' revolutionary duty. It is a purge, not of individual members from the party, except in a limited way, but of unrevolutionary, and therefore counter-revolutionary, thoughts and acts from men's thoughts and behavior.

Yet there is in Debray's book not the first hint of a recognition that a Communist Party has this kind of all-important role to play, although he was writing at the time of the Cultural Revolution, an experience and example from which all revolutionaries should learn a great deal.

I am most concerned, however, with the potentially deleterious effect of Debray's thinking on the movement in the United States. On a traditional level (leaving aside, for now, Cultural Revolutions), there are two kinds of political education. From action and experience, especially struggle against the ruling class and its agents, we learn who our enemies are, and who our allies are (and are not), and we learn about alliances with other sectors and classes. We learn also something of how "the system" works, what *some* of the interconnections are, how power is wielded at the lower levels of oppression (in controlling us). These are extremely valuable lessons to learn; aside from their intrinsic value, which is great, they form the basis without which all other forms of learning are substantially useless.

But built upon, and concurrent with, learning-through-

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experience is another form of political education: the development to a higher level of generalization of the principles and insights gained in learning-through-experience. If we are ever to think about social change in a long-term, strategic, historical sense, this ability to generalize from our, and our comrades', particular experience is absolutely vital. But it is a skill too little appreciated, much less practiced, in our movement.

The point has been frequently made, and is only too true: People in "the movement" are too often un- or anti-intellectual, and we lack historical roots and solid radical scholarship. I greatly fear that the impact of Debray's statement that activism is the sole form of political education, will be to encourage these unfortunate traits among New Leftists in the United States.

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(Continued from inside front cover)

writings and his actions, he threatened the rule of all Latin American oligarchies and their North American master. We are confident that we speak for all the authors in this collection when we salute Régis Debray for his courage and his example, and send him fraternal greetings and wishes for an early liberation.

We will of course attempt to have a copy of this issue delivered to Debray, and we will be glad to accord him whatever space for a reply he may be able and willing to take advantage of.

Harry Braverman, Director of Monthly Review Press, was in Paris during the height of the May student uprising. His eye-witness account of those exciting days appeared in the *Nation* of June 3. He speaks of touring the Paris bookstores "where the most prominently displayed volumes are those which, over the past few years, have surely had a great deal to do with the creation of the mood that burst out in the streets: Guevara, Castro, and Camilo Torres; Jalée and Nizan; Trotsky and Mao; Marcuse and C. Wright Mills. And Marx everywhere. . . ." Readers will note that this list includes three MR Press authors: Guevara (*Guerrilla Warfare* and *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War*), Pierre Jalée (*Pillage of the Third World*), and Paul Nizan (*Aden, Arabie*). Let us hope that they are doing their part in creating the similar mood that prevails among the advanced students of this country!

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